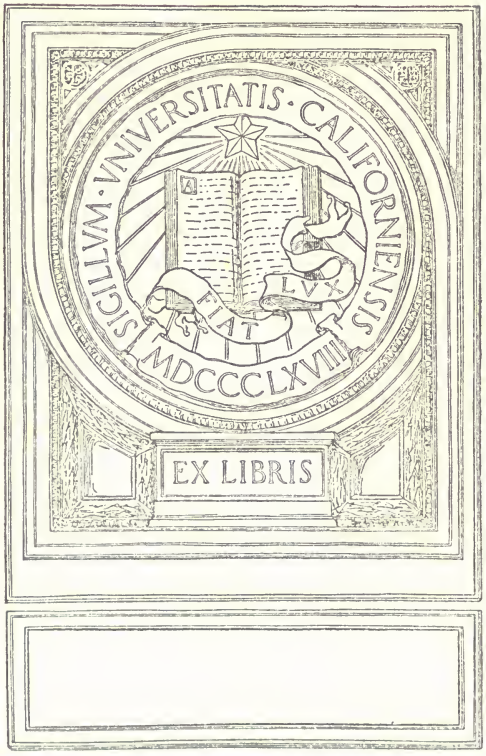
WE ALL

BY

OCTAVE THANET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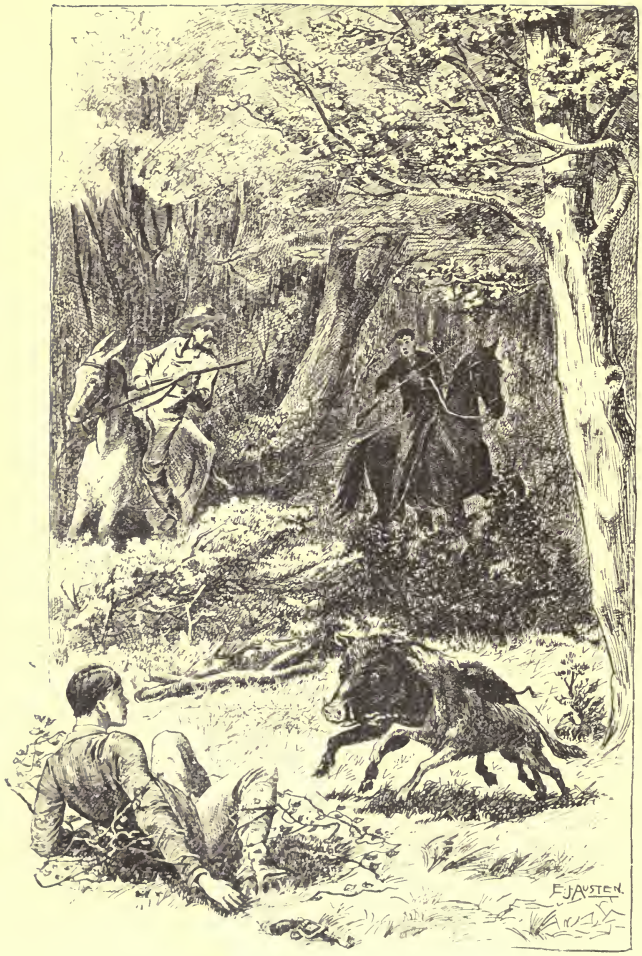

He heard the clash of the creature's teeth.

WE ALL

BY

OCTAVE THANET

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS
BY E. J. AUSTEN AND J. P. BIRREN

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TO

THREE LITTLE CHILDREN I LOVE

HARRY, DECKER, AND GRACE

M532954

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WE ALL.

CHAPTER I.

COUSIN CECIL.

ALAN and Sally Seyton came home from school an hour earlier than usual, in order to go to the railway station with their father, to meet their cousin Cecil.

Really they did not go home; they only crossed the green between the little white school-house and old man Johnson's cotton-patch, and waited under the great black-walnut tree until they saw the "hack" coming with Zurufa and Polly trotting fast, their tails and manes flying.

In Arkansas a hack is simply a spring-wagon, so named because of the hard usage to which such vehicles are exposed on Arkansas roads.

Already the hack was splashed with mud. Colonel Seyton sat alone on the front seat of the wagon; the other seat was empty.

Every little darkey on the plantation would grin at the sight of Colonel Seyton's tanned, smiling face, and bright blue eyes.

The Seytons were Scotch a hundred years ago; and, while the Southern sun might stain their fair skins, it could not darken their clear blue eyes, or fade out the red dash in the brown of their curly hair.

Colonel Dick Seyton's left sleeve was pinned to his breast, but with the reins about his neck, and with his strong right hand, he guided his horses perfectly.

That empty sleeve came from the same battle-field that gave him his colonel's eagle. A score of times had the old soldiers of his father's regiment told Alan the story, until he seemed to see the red-and-white flag falling, and his father, with his shattered arm, springing from his horse, catching the colors with his sound hand, beating down the Yankee gunner with the staff itself, and then sinking, but, even as he dropped, clutching the staff so that the flag might float above his prostrate body.

"And we won the fort, didn't we?" Alan would cry, with sparkling eyes. "One of the men hollered, 'Don't leave the major and the flag!' and

then they went flying up the ramparts, didn't they?"

Not until long afterward could he understand why Cobb gave a quiet sort of sigh as he answered, "Oh, yes, boy, we won that time."

To-day, however, Alan's brain had other matters for digestion. He chipped away with his broken-bladed pocket-knife at the edges of the big sign nailed on the walnut-tree, cheerful advice to "buy your ready-made coffins in Portia, Arkansas, of J. G. Topper," but it was purely from the boyish instinct to be destroying something, for his thoughts were far away. So were Sally's. "Do you reckon he will look like his picture, Ally?" said she.

"No," said Ally, sorrowfully; "do *we* look like our pictures that we sent him?"

"We do, a little," Sally suggested, meekly; "sometimes people look like their pictures."

"Well, I don't care how he looks, if he is nice. I dare say he can't shoot—" Alan's thoughts had left the unimportant subject of appearance, and gone to the real business of life—"I'm going to lend him my gun and show him."

"And I'll show him how to row," said Sally.

"Say, Sally, isn't it lucky we got all those pecans drying? 'Course, he likes pecans."

"How do you know he does?" said Sally. "Well, may be. Northerners don't like persimmons; that's what they don't like. His room is all ready." The children were pursuing different lines of thought, although they converged on the same subject. "I finished the pin-cushion yesterday, and he's got the silk quilt"—Sally's tones were reverential—"mamma says he's going to have it all the time. And she's put in the dressing-case."

"The one he sent her last Christmas from London with all the ivory things?"

"Yes, it's there. And the new curtains tied with ribbon. And she took that pretty picture he sent me, last Christmas, and hung it up on the wall —oh, it does look awfully pretty! And say, Ally, she's going to have some hot coffee for us when we get back!"

"Good for her! There's papa! Whoop!" Colonel Seyton acknowledged the shout, and lifted his own hat in response to Alan, who was swinging his sealskin cap in the air.

"Hop in, youngsters!" he called, reining in the horses. Alan climbed in front by his father, and Sally sat on the back seat.

"Let me drive, papa?" asked Alan.

"I'll do better," answered Colonel Seyton with a smile; "you keep your eye on me and the way I drive, going, and when we come back you may take the lines. Look out for the corduroy patch after we get to the woods, now!"

"The boy will like to show off a bit, I dare say," thought the father. "Well, our young Northerner may find that we know how to do a few things in the swamp. A conceited young rascal, I fear, from the letter. Favors his mother, most likely. Poor John!"

He mentally rehearsed the letter which he had received from his wife's cousin and his own warm friend. "Nellie" (Nellie was Mrs. Raimund) "is going to Europe, as usual. She will spend the winter in the south of France. She wanted to take Cecil, but I objected. To tell the truth, Dick, these European trips are playing the mischief with Cis. You know with what a gang—courier, maids, tutor, etc.—Nellie always travels, and the hotel people ready to stand on their heads for her; and every now and then a lot of toadies from home joining the court, so to speak. Cis is a good boy, naturally, as any man could wish, but he is beginning to think too much of luxury and money; he is getting suspicious and cynical, the young beggar. But when

I think of the doses of abject flattery he is receiving right and left, because he will one day inherit my money, I don't so much wonder.

"Then, it is not much better when he comes back to Chicago. There are plenty of men who don't care a rap for my money or Nellie's big balls, but *they* stay away; but the idiots who are ready to crawl on all-fours come, and Cis sees them.

"Don't misunderstand me. Cis is a good boy. He has no bad habits; he is generous, unselfish to a certain extent, and very fond of a few people; but he is getting spoiled: he needs to be Americanized, needs to see a simple, natural life, where he will have to stand on his own feet; and, if he gets a few sound thrashings, it may save him from worse, that's all! Now, Dick, I am going to ask a great favor of you; I believe the very best thing in the world for Cecil would be to spend the winter on your plantation. It is a great deal to ask, but, if Cousin Emily is the girl I used to know, she will be willing to help my boy."

There was more about his own plans, but this was the portion of the letter that had been etched, as it were, on the colonel's mind, and made him exclaim again, "Poor John!"

Then he was conscious that Ally was talking.

"Did you save Cousin John Raimund's life, papa?" said Ally. "Cobb said you did."

"Well, hardly," said the colonel.

"Cobb said you two were left on the battle-field together, just you two alive, and you gave him some of your whisky, and he was a Yankee, and then you took him on your back and crawled off with him to a house. Did you take him on your back and crawl?"

"Well, I couldn't walk right straight with a bullet in my leg, you know."

"And you did tote him?"

"I reckon he couldn't make out to crawl himself, just then."

"And Cobb says you stayed there with him till you both got well. After you got to Cobb's, did you find out he was your cousin?"

"He *wasn't* papa's cousin then," Sally interrupted from the back seat; "he was mamma's cousin, and mamma didn't know papa until after the war."

"Oh!" said Ally, the astounding vision of days when mamma was nothing to papa quite taking his power of criticism away.

He sat silent for at least half an hour. Sally said as little, because she was absorbed in a half-

eager, half-timid reverie of pleasure. The far-away Northern cousin, whose beautiful presents came to them every Christmas, and whose rare letters were all about wonderful foreign things, had grown into an ideal fairy prince in untraveled little Sally's mind. It seemed too beautiful to be true that he should really be coming to stay all winter with them.

Alan was pleased, but he always took things more calmly than his twin sister, who sat with dancing eyes and beating heart while the big cypress and gum trees drifted past.

"There they are!" exclaimed Colonel Seyton, abruptly.

The children craned their necks; they could see the little railway-station house and the tavern beside it, and a train of cars just puffing and rumbling out of sight. A single car was side-tracked on the nearer side. From this car descended a gentleman and a boy, both of whom looked up the road.

The two on the platform were looking with equal interest at the wagon.

"Yes," said the man—and there was emotion in his face,—"that is Seyton; those must be his children."

"Those common-looking people!" exclaimed the boy, with visible disappointment.

He repented his speech instantly, for a little streak of red climbed into his father's cheek, and there came a quick contraction of his brows; but all Mr. Raimund said was, "I am hoping you will not feel like talking that way by the time you come home, Cis," which was uttered in a very quiet voice.

Yet Cecil felt a lump in his throat; not even John Raimund himself knew how the boy loved his father. At this very moment a bitter foreboding of loneliness was tugging at his heart-strings. He stared dismally around him; at the little tavern, the muddy roads winding back into the desolate woods, the skeletons of trees, and the inky pools of water shining through the tree-trunks. There was a mist before his eyes which all his winking could not clear away. In spite of multitudinous resolutions of courage and self-control, he broke down. "O dad," he pleaded—he had called his father so from his babyhood, to his mother's intense disgust—"O dad, let me stay with you! I won't be a bit of trouble, and I'll stay in the car whenever you want to go out with gentlemen—"

His father's hand on his shoulder, although it was the gentlest touch, stopped the flood of words.

"My dear son," said John Raimund, "my dear boy—" and then he stopped, too, quite abruptly; it was almost as if—could such a thing be possible—he, a grown man, wanted to cry.

In a minute he began again. "Cis, you may not understand it, but it is a very hard thing for me not to take you with me—harder for me, I dare say, than for you. After you come back from this visit I am going to explain to you as well as I can why I thought it best to do this hard thing for both of us. In the mean while I can trust you to make it easier for me by being patient?"

Cecil winked twice, and his sensitive face was screwed up into a queer little frown of resolution, but presently he forced a smile.

"Yes, dad, you can," said he, firmly.

"Thank you. You're a gentleman, Cis." His father said it very low, because the wagon-wheels were grating against the platform; nevertheless, the words tingled through Cecil's heart, giving him a warm, happy feeling, which would come for weeks after whenever he recalled them.

"This is my son Cecil," he heard his father's voice say in louder tones. He took off his cap and bowed—first, to the one-armed man; next, to the slim little dark-eyed girl. Then he held out his

hand to the boy, all the while acutely conscious that his father was wringing the one-armed man's hand with an extraordinary cordiality.

"You're Alan, I suppose," said Cecil, politely. "I'm glad to meet you."

"Yes, I'm Alan," said the boy, grinning in the rudest way, Cis thought; "that's Sally. Do you remember this cap?" He touched the sealskin cap on his head, and looked vaguely disappointed at Cecil's look of bewilderment. "You sent it to me last Christmas, you know."

"Oh, yes," said Cecil. He remembered buying it with his father one happy, happy afternoon in the London shops; with the Tower in the morning for another recollection; best of all, dad quite to himself the whole day. He felt his throat aching again.

Trying to force his composure back, he examined his new cousins, who were quite as busy with his appearance.

Cecil saw a girl of fourteen in a perfectly neat and comfortable brown frock, with a trim little brown jacket and a pretty brown hat; but this premature man of fashion stamped the whole costume as "awfully country" in an instant. He was more favorably impressed with her appearance. Her silky

black hair hung in two thick braids down her back. Her face had the charming oval shape which is common in Arkansas, and she had the dark, velvety Arkansas eyes, with their curling long lashes and beautiful brows. Cecil admired the delicate pallor of her skin, her scarlet lips and flashing teeth, though he considered her mouth too large. Cis, at fifteen, was fastidious and esteemed himself a judge of ladies' charms.

The boy was dismissed with the slightest glance in the world: a stolid, square-figured, freckle-faced, red-haired youngster, whose wide blue eyes stared persistently at every motion of the stranger's, and who chewed gum cheerfully while he stared.

On their side, Ally and Sally saw a handsome, gray-haired gentleman, whose air of distinction was marked enough to impress even a child, and a lad who resembled his father in the light, erect figure and clear gray eyes, but who had other lines in his pale face.

Sally, being a woman-child, had noted at once the little elegant details of both travelers' toilets—from the slender umbrella in its silk case and the alligator-skin traveling-bag, which lay on the platform, to Cecil's immaculately brushed knickerbockers and shining shoes. Alan, however, only

thought what an awful shame it was to keep such a big boy "in stockings and short pants!" and began to revolve a scheme for rigging Cis out in some of the store trousers. "They're long, anyhow," said Alan to himself.

By this time the elders had finished their private conference, and Mr. Raimund was asking them all to look at his car before they went away.

A private car would hardly impress a New York or Chicago boy, but to our simple plantation youngsters, who had been awe-struck by the splendors of an ordinary Pullman, during their few journeys, this gorgeous room was a palace on wheels, like nothing outside the fairy-books.

The blue plush curtains, shot through with gold threads, the dainty china glittering in the sideboard, the carved wood, the resplendent lamps, and, perhaps, quite as much as anything, the marvelous little kitchen, where the white-capped cook was busy among his beautiful copper pots, threw their childish souls into a kind of daze of admiration.

"You will have a glass of wine with me, old man?" said Mr. Raimund.

And it was just like the Arabian Nights, Sally and Alan thought, where you rub a ring and lo, a genius at your elbow with your wish!—instantly a

black man, in smart uniform of blue and gold, appeared bearing a salver, sparkling with glasses and ice. The children's enraptured eyes could recognize a bottle, the neck of which had a shimmer of gold, and a glass jug, and a plate of cake, beautiful to behold.

"Cis thought his cousins might like a glass of lemonade and some cake," said Mr. Raimund, smiling very kindly on the pair.

"I suppose, now," he added to Colonel Seyton, touching Alan on the shoulder, "that you have trained him to ride, shoot, and tell the truth, like the ancient Persians."

"As we say in Arkansas, nearly 'bout," answered Colonel Seyton, laughing; "you might add driving. He is going to drive us back."

Mr. Raimund glanced out of the window at the horses' mud-coated legs.

"I trust you are to sit on the driver's seat," said he. Colonel Seyton assured him of Alan's prudence. Then the talk drifted off to other topics. There was something which keen-eared Sally caught about a new mill. Mr. Raimund had heard that her father wanted to build a new gin. He seemed to be offering to lend him money. "Why not, Dick?" he said, quite eagerly; "it's just an investment."

"Well, sir," laughed the colonel, "to tell you the truth, I've just lifted the last of my debts, and I want to have the luxury of being a free man for a while."

Then their voices sank, and Sally was burdened in her conscience with a sudden sense of responsibility to this new cousin at whom Ally sat staring as happily and unconcernedly as if he had been a circus-show—of which, indeed, it appeared the whole establishment reminded Master Ally.

"Say," said he, at the first pause, addressing Cecil, "did you ever go to Barnum's?"

"Barnum's? Barnum's circus?" said Cecil. "I'm not sure; I think I did one year, in Chicago. I like the theatre better, don't you?"

"I never went to a theatre," said Ally, "but mamma has told me about them. It's just folks talking and pretending—no horses or animals or even somersets—I don't reckon I'd like it. But Barnum's *splendid!* This car looks like his."

"Only its nicer," said polite Sally.

"Oh, thank you very much," said Cecil, with rather a queer accent; "won't you let me show it to you?"

He did the honors most courteously, Sally tried to be enthusiastic, but there was a cold dash to

her sentiment. Did Cecil live always in such luxury? She thought of her own home, the stately old mansion of the Seytons, which the last Seytons had been far too poor to keep in its original pomp. How would it seem to him?

"And you go everywhere with your father in this car?" she said, timidly, still with the burden of politeness on her mind.

"It's his car," said Cecil, carelessly; "all railroad men have cars. Oh, yes; we have friends, too, sometimes. Sometimes mamma comes with her friends. Then it's an awful nuisance—the maids and all, you know. There are a couple of gentlemen with papa, now, but they went on down to Little Rock." He stopped short and grew a little paler.

"Oh, there's another train coming!" shouted Alan, who was near a window.

"It is to take our car," said Cecil, quietly; then he smiled bravely up at his father's look.

In a moment the parting was over. The black man had bundled Cecil's luggage into the wagon. Hurriedly Cecil had kissed his father; hurriedly the two friends had shaken hands. There was the glimpse of a head out of a window, a waving of hands, the last look in his father's eyes—ah! it

was all gone ; only the horses splashing recklessly through the mud and the forest, and these strange uncouth people, and the lump tight in his throat !

But no matter how miserable a boy may be, he must care for his life ; and very soon it seemed to Cecil that they were in imminent peril.

All trace of a road had disappeared. Before them, to the right and the left, was nothing but water under the trees. Yet Alan drove confidently along, and, from the continuous jolting and bumping, Cecil argued that there must be ground of some kind beneath. Sally, who had divined his feelings, and pitied him as much as she dared pity such a superior sort of young being, replied to the consternation in his face.

"It's lucky there's only soft mud to-day!" she said, "and there's a right good, hard corduroy underneath. It's when we get past, on to the bad road where the holes are, that's it bad.' '

"Oh, there's worse, then?" said Cecil, gloomily.

"I reckon there is," answered Alan with enthusiasm. "It's nothing driving here ; but just you wait till we get past Aunt Valley Lemew's old place ! It's like falling off a table, the holes are so big."

"And we have a ford, too—a big ford," added Sally, proudly.

"Is this your only road to the railroad?" Cecil asked, after a pause of dismay.

"Well, practically, yes," said Colonel Seyton; "but the road is good enough three fourths of the year."

Cecil tried to divert himself by studying the scenery. The swamp stretched all about him. Trees of strange and grotesque growth, such as he had never seen, rattled their huge branches above the morass. Soft, green moss, was thick on some of them. On the surface of the water a pale-green brier interlaced and bristled. He saw a small tree to the right, that was spattered with berries, red like blood. Great shrubs, bare of stalk, but surmounted by black plumes, stood among the giant trees. On either side the road made a watery path through the forest.

Colonel Seyton pointed out the cypress trees and knees. "And that tree with warts on it and the limbs growing so low down?" said Cecil.

"A good description," said the colonel. "That is a hackberry-tree. There is a tupelo-gum; see the swell-butt, like the cypress, but no knees. They

used to make bowls and platters out of tupelo-gum. Well, here is the ford."

Cecil, in his own mind, called it a river.

Alan twisted in his seat to smile and reassure the guest.

"Looks big, but it's got a good bottom," said he; "better h'ist your feet up, sis.—Say, Cousin Cecil, won't you have a chew of gum? I got a fresh piece."

This was a very long speech for Alan to make to a stranger. His father and sister appreciated the courteous motive; but Cecil only noticed how he held the horses with his left hand while his right tugged at his pocket. Being like most boys' pockets, it was inconveniently full.

"He will certainly spill us," thought Cecil, yet he could not but admire the nerve of the young savage, as he called poor Ally.

"No, thank you," said he hastily, much relieved when Ally turned again.

"The water did not quite get into the wagon, neither did the horses quite have to swim; but that is the best you can say about the ford." So Cecil described their passage in a letter to his father.

He was glad when they were on the corduroy

again, but he did not wince; he was not going to let these barbarous children laugh at him.

"Do you have much shooting here, Colonel Seyton?" he asked, with his little man-of-the-world air.

"Well, a bit," answered the colonel, his eye twinkling; "wild turkeys, deer, now and then a wild-hog hunt. Ally can tell you of some good sport, I reckon."

"I'll teach you to shoot," Ally rapped out eagerly; "you can have my gun."

"Thank you," answered Cecil, "I have brought my gun."

"And I expect you shoot, too," said Sally.

"I have been shooting for five years," said Cecil with great dignity.

Ally, who should properly have been disconcerted, burst into a laugh.

"Oh, what a joke!" said he. "Sis and I put it up you couldn't shoot or ride or anything, and she was going to teach you to row and lend you her boat. Say, can you ride and row?"

"I thought I could," said Cecil, his dignity unabated, while Colonel Seyton, on the front seat, chuckled in his sleeve, and Sally looked distressed.

"Oh, we're so sorry we made such a mistake,"

said she. But Alan continued to regard the mistake as a joke.

"Never you mind, you shall lend me *your* gun, then," said he, with the broad smile that Cecil was beginning to think odious. Sally, he said to himself, really was a niceish little girl.

"There's Aunt Valley's old house, and there's the bad road," said Colonel Seyton, claiming all their attention.

CHAPTER II.

THE OLD "CONJURE-WOMAN."

They were passing a ruined hovel that had sunk backward off its rotting props into the swamp.

"Did anybody ever live in such a hole?" said Cecil.

"Lived in it and will have to pay rent for it, I fear.—Look out for the holes, boy."

Though Cecil was a brave lad, he felt his heart in his throat.

They appeared to be in a veritable quagmire. The horses would plunge into great holes and the wagon lurch after them.

Yet Alan calmly pulled and shouted in his boyish treble, and guided the panting, struggling beasts in a zigzag course until the firm land was reached.

Cecil drew a long breath. "You do drive very well," said he.

"That's not a much bad road," said Ally, simply.

"Is you all done heerd the news?"

"Look, there's Aunt Valley and the mules!—Howdy? Aunt Valley, howdy?"

All three saluted a bent black woman, who hobbled through a gate to the roadside.

She was, it seemed to Cecil, the very blackest negress that he had ever seen. She wore a piece of flour-sack for a turban, and the grotesqueness of her rolling eyeballs, wide nostrils, and hollow cheeks was enhanced by a pair of brass ear-rings. The ragged apron of jean, and the faded print skirt and buttonless blue woolen "bass" (as the negroes call a basque) did not consort on equal terms with the finery above, but, to make amends, around her gaunt black neck sparkled a string of amber beads.

A fit background for this weird figure was the wretched cabin, with its "stick-and-dirt chimney," its beetling roof, and yawning pillars. Behind two great gum-trees it seemed slinking out of sight, yet scowling at the same time, like a beggar who resents the charity by which he lives.

"Howdy, cunnel?" said the old woman, calmly. She almost smiled on Ally. "Howdy, boss? howdy, missy? Is you all done heerd the news?"

"What news, Aunt Valley?" said Sally.

Aunt Valley chewed at her snuff-stick before she answered; "Wall, Unk Josep' Peat, he came

by yere, a spell ago back, and he been tellin' of it t' me. Hit's awful, ain't it?"

"Awful! What?" cried both the young Seytons in a breath.

"Waal, he did say, the Ku-klux ben out agin, las' night—"

"That's nonsense," Colonel Seyton interrupted. "There aren't any more Ku-klux in the country."

"Den dar come some new ones," persisted the negress; "sayd dey been out all night warnin' all de niggers to light out, mighty briefly, an lebe deir homes an' 'sessions; firing guns an' pistils frow de houses; sayd dey done kill Sis Pearl Hotchkiss, plum daid."

This speech, which Aunt Valley delivered in a plaintive monotone, dragging her last words negro fashion, produced a visible effect on the party.

Cecil alone was not surprised, because the state of things described was precisely his innocent notion of Arkansas. How wise he esteemed himself to have carried his revolver—now uncomfortably weighing down his inside pocket!

But the residents took matters less coolly. Consternation and horror were painted on Sally's face. Colonel Seyton looked very stern, and even the

stolid Ally puckered his mouth into an inaudible whistle of dismay.

"Stuff!" said Colonel Seyton; "he's fooling you."

Aunt Valley rubbed a gnarled and wrinkled hand slowly down her knee, shaking her head. Two of the tight little braids, in which the negroes keep their wool, stuck out under her turban like horns.

"Looked like he wudn't be a-foolin'," she said, meekly—all the same there was a keen look from the tail of her eye. "He ben a perfessin' member, an' he did seem p'intedly wuked up."

"How many men did he say were out?"

"I doan rightly unnerstan' he did see any hissef, but dey all done come t' his place a-rarin' an' chargin', makin' noise like a army wid bananas, he sayd—"

"Army with bananas—what in thunder! Oh, I reckon you mean banners?"

Aunt Valley revealed her full stature, being really a tall woman when she stood straight. She answered in a very dignified manner—for none of us like to be corrected in our language: "I ain't 'sponsible, sah, fo' Brer' Peat's talkin's. Dat like he call 'em. Sayd dey holler an' shoot deir guns

an' pistils, an' in the mahnin', by sun-up, when he hairten hissef nuff t' git out, he seen a big notus stuck on dey all's sycamore-tree a-warnin' all de culled folkses to lebe de kentry fo' de week's endin'."

"Did you see the notice?" said the colonel.

No, Aunt Valley hadn't seen it herself; how could she see it, poor old black nigger woman, never knowing nothin' until Brer' Peat come by and tell her? But Brer' Peat done fotched the notice to the store. "An' dar," said Aunt Valley, "he met up wid a right smart o' culled pussons a fleein' from de wrath to come. Dey all sayd de same tale—how dey come to deir haouses hollerin' wid all de power an' shootin' guns; an' dey find notus, too, in de mahnin'! Yes, sah."

"Who were they all?"

"Waal—Solomon, you fool mule, want out, does ye? Come yere, right straight. Sneakin' off dat way! Ye isn't sharp nuff t' cut *me!* Come by! You heah me?"

To Cecil's amazement the biggest mule, quite a little space down the road, turned obediently at the word and trotted up to Aunt Valley. She picked an ear of corn from her apron and put it in his

mouth. The other mules eyed this interesting episode wistfully, but did not stir.

"I got 'em right well trained up, I is dat," said Aunt Valley. "Dey all follers at de wud o' commandment like sojers.—Heah, you Abram Linkun, you twurn, now." Abram Linkun approached, received his corn, and retired in good order.

The children were more pleased than Colonel Seyton by such by-play; he impatiently repeated his question. But the obstinate old woman must have her own way.

"Cayn't be pa'shal nohow t' dese animiles," she grunted; "dey got heap mo' feelings t' be hurted nur folkses got. Melodeon! *Me*lodeon! how come you doan' hark t' me better?"

Melodeon, with positively a dejected air, like a boy caught in gross inattention, came up for his portion. Aunt Valley patted him. Then she made a gesture toward the mules.

"Dey ain't but *tree* er dem, now," said she, with an indescribable quiver of her hard face.

"What!" cried Colonel Seyton, "did that—ur—Dawsey get Mr. Henderson?"

She nodded, clinching her fist.

"De co't reward him. Dat a way he call it. Got my mule fo' de rent he solum prommus me I

doan hab nebber to pay. Nev' mind; I'se po' old black nigger an' he great rich w'ite man, but I'se sharp nuff t' cut him yet. My Lord, I swar I do it! I swar I be to him like de wolveses * to de sheep. I will! I will!"

While the negress was speaking, her repressed fury worked in her until it burst the flimsy mask of composure. Blind to her audience, apparently, her great eyes glowed like live coals, her voice swelled into the harshness and volume of a man's, her bent figure straightened, and the corn in her skirt tumbled in a yellow heap over the ground as she swung both her arms above her head with swift, impassioned motions, screaming: "Ya'as! ya'as! ya'as! my Lord, he got my Mist' Henderson, dat I done raised from a teenty colt, de sharpes', bigges', stronges' ur dem all, He got him pullin' de stalk cutter, so dirty an' ga'nted; † an' him, him a-drivin' him, hollerin' an' sw'arin'—beatin' dat good, willin' mule wid de whip! Oh, my Lord, I sw'ar I nebber quit hearin' dem blows 'twell I pay dat w'ite t'ief aout!"

Suddenly her wrath collapsed into a groan of

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* Aunt Valley meant, not wolves the animals, but a species of tick which burrows in sheep and horses' skins causing them almost mortal irritation and pain.

† Gan'ted. Thin.

pain as her features twisted and she bent over nearly double, both hands gripping her back.

"De mizry ketch me jes dar, ef I stan' straight," she moaned; "but I plumb forgit ever'ting on earth, w'en I git studyin' bout dat. Cunnel, you been axin' of me questing, sah?"

"At the store? Who all came to the store?"

Aunt Valley ran over half a dozen names which sounded very queer to Cecil. "Everybody seems to be an uncle or an aunt or a brother or an old man, South," thought he.

"Who told Peat any one was killed?" the colonel questioned.

Aunt Valley didn't rightly know.

"Was any one else hurt?"

She 'lowed not. The only colored person dast look out been Mark Looney. He said there been rising of six of them "all wid w'ite maskes like hants *—turrible to see."

"Did they come to you, Aunt Valley?" said the colonel.

"Naw, sah," said Aunt Valley.

"Well, I'll look it up. Good—"

"I ain't sayin' I didn't see *suthin'* yestiddy night, sah."

* Hants (i. e., haunts) is the common negro name for ghosts.

"Ah," said the colonel, "that puts another face on it. Well?"

"Dis yere young gen'lman, who he?" A misshapen black hand wavered in the air before Cecil. "Boss an' missy, dey Seytons, but who *he* am?"

"Oh, he won't give you away, Aunt Valley," said Alan, and Sally added with a flush and her head a little higher in the air, "He's our cousin."

"Then I knows well nuff I'se safe," was Aunt Valley's comment. "Wa'al, the way on't been, I bein' by my lone, habin' no man pusson t' gyard of me"— Here Colonel Seyton had some ado to smother a chuckle, it being common gossip that Aunt Valley's husband had lived in abject fear of her, and finally fled outright, because she used to tie him up all the next day, did he come back too late at night or not quite sober, while her favorite remonstrance was slapping him in the face with the dish-rag. Very well did the colonel remember Uncle Hobson's plaint: "I knows I does aggererawate an' rile Valley, an' I makes 'lowances an' forgibs de dish-water trowed at me befo' it rightly did get cool. An' I forgibs de dish-rag; but dis bein' strained er my liberty, dat ain't whut I gwine stan' no mo', ef Valley *kin* cook a mighty fine meal er vittles.

Dar's mo' dan vittles an' eatin' in dis life, an' Valley an' me got t' pyart."

Unconscious Aunt Valley went on with her narrative. She said, being by her lone "dat away," it was her habit to lock her doors every night; and, last night hearing "sorter rumling noise," and being afraid that her chickens might "pale out" of the garden (that is, escape through the fence "palings"), she rose and opened her door. By the moonlight she saw Dawsey riding by on his big clay-bank horse.

"I jes natchelly ben *struck*," said Aunt Valley, "kase it ben by de light o' de moon, an' de moon doan be up twell nigh mahnin' now. But I knowed him fo' sho'. I know dem hunch wethers * o' hisn. 'How come you does be out so late?' says I."

Aunt Valley made her speech dramatic by going through her experience, as one acting it again; she flung out her hand, and drew back her body, and scowled, after an imaginary Dawsey. Now she whirled on her feet. "I look back at de house over yander; dar de light a-burnin' bright. Says I, 'You onery murderin' Dawsey, you aim play a blin' caff on somebody, dat sho'—"

"A blind calf does she mean?" Cecil asked Sally, very low.

* Shoulders.

Sally was absorbed in Aunt Valley's narration, but she instantly explained, at length, that to play a blind calf was to sell a blind calf for a good one, hence to play any trick. "To do you any kind of meanness, you know," said Sally.

"Oh, yes, thank you," said Cecil, instantly concluding that it was a country of tricks, and resolved to be warily on his guard.

Unaware of the impression that she had unwittingly given her cousin, Sally turned all her interest back on Aunt Valley, who was now relating how she was awakened from a dream of the judgment-day and a blissful vision of Dawsey being pitchforked by small fiends "jes little tricks er debbils, you all unnerstans," out of his grave; "an' all de grabe-stuns a-blowin' sky west and crooked." Aunt Valley illustrated her words with wild gestures. "An' de las' trump a-blowin' an' a goin'! An' den, ef you please, I did wake up, an' it didn't ben nuffin' but Melodeon! Dat Melodeon does got a lubbly strong voice."

Nevertheless, Aunt Valley rose and opened the door to see "whut got Melodeon," and again she saw Dawsey riding furiously; this time, toward his house as the other time he had been riding away. She saw him plainly.

"Did he wear a mask?" asked Colonel Seyton.

"Naw, sah."

"Did you watch him?"

"In cose. Twell he ride froo he own gate."

"And was the light burning?"

"Ya'as, sah. Den hit go out."

"Well, I reckon I must look into things," said the colonel.

He gave a sign to Ally. The horses sprang forward. Cecil's last vision of the old negro woman showed him her gaunt black figure moving about the cotton-field behind the house, the three mules following, dog-like, at her heels.

CHAPTER III.

LARRY.

THERE was no longer any stiffening of the joints of conversation. Both the young Seytons' tongues were running at once.

They rattled a fusillade of question and comment at their father, who between his answers contrived to help Cecil to a new notion of Arkansas.

He was astonished to discover how peaceful, honest, free from violence, was the supposed home of carnage and the bowie-knife.

"Why," declared the colonel, "I haven't known a man killed in five years. Twenty years ago, maybe— Oh, well, I'm not talking about twenty years ago, or during the 'gray-back' times; it's *now*, the living present, as the poet calls it. And honest, I assure you, Cecil, Aunt Valley is the only person in the bottom who feels bound to lock up at night, and she"—the colonel chuckled

—"*she* hasn't got a key on earth—calls it locking up when she turns the button. That is what puzzles me about this racket. We haven't any tough characters in the neighborhood. The race question doesn't amount to a row of pins here, where the whites outnumber the negroes. It must be either a wild hoax or some personal enmity to me."

"Why to you, Colonel Seyton?"

"Because they are all my tenants. We had a large crop this year, and dirty weather in October. The cotton-pickers who come down every year from Missouri got discouraged and lit out, as we say. Now, it will take all hands to pick the rest of the cotton before Christmas. If they can scare off my tenants, I am likely to lose a heap of my cotton before I can get it to the gin. Besides, there are the farms standing empty. A bad lookout all round, you understand."

"Well, I know who did it," spoke up Sally, whose cheeks were flushed like a wild rose, with her excitement.

"No, you don't *know*, sis," said Ally; "you can't *know*." Ally had gleams of the canny Scotchman.

"Well, I'm sure as sure. It's that hateful old

man Dawsey. He is always trying to do us a meanness."

"Cobb did say he put ground glass in Spider's oats," Ally remarked, musingly.

"Well, we won't say he did it until we know," said the colonel, getting his one arm over the back seat, the better to pat Sally's shoulder—"that is, outside. This is confidential."

"Sure," said Ally.

"Certainly, Colonel Seyton," said Cecil.

Sally only squeezed her father's hand and rubbed his bare wrist against her rose-leaf cheek.

"They are like dad and me," Cecil thought, with a little contraction of the heart, a homesick craving for a sight of the dear figure that every minute was bearing swiftly farther and farther away from him.

Yet I believe it was from this instant that he began to like Sally.

"Who is Mr. Dawson, please?" said he, diverting his thoughts with the nearest pretext. Why need he be such a baby as to want to cry every time he thought of dad?

"Dawsey," said the colonel—"*Dawsey*. Well, he is the man who enjoys the undisputed title of the meanest man in the country. He lives a little

way farther on. When he bought the farm, there was a fine orchard. He cut down every tree, and turned it into a cotton-field, because the boys took his peaches. He owned that old wood-pile in the woods. It isn't what you would call a commodious dwelling, is it? And a man died of hydrophobia there, to the bargain. He died in such an awful way, nobody would live in the house. But old Aunt Valley's cabin burned down, and she is suspected of being a conjure-woman herself—"

"I beg pardon?" from Cecil.

"May be you all would call her a witch. She protests that she is only a bone-setter and a 'yarb doctor,' but, being a cross-grained old woman, with trained mules, you can't expect people to let her off so easily. No, sir, the niggers, hereabouts, are persuaded that she threw lizards into old Aunt Crecy Miller. And they think her husband ran away because she tried to conjure him. Well—never mind all that—at any rate, not being social like most darkeys, she didn't mind living alone; and she says, furthermore, that Dawsey promised her the house and land, rent free, she only agreeing to plant corn for his stock. *He* claims she promised to pay fifteen dollars a year and one third of her crop. And he showed a contract to that effect. She stayed

there two years, then he came down for the rent of his house and six acres, declaring that he had not been paid a cent. She says she only cultivated three acres and helped put the other three in corn for his stock, and that when she signed the contract, she thought it was to release her from any other liability. She can write her name, but can't read writing. The court, however, was bound by the evidence, and the contract held good. So he got a judgment for two years' rent and distrained her mule."

"Yes, and he took poor Mrs. Whitehead's cows," cried Sally; "his dogs were forever chasing her cows and making them wild, and one day she took down her gun when she saw the dog after her cows—they were just naturally coming into the yard—and she shot the dog. He was the meanest dog, awful big and fierce; he nearly killed off poor Henri, our dog, the cutest dog you ever saw—"

"He just naturally would have killed Henri," interrupted Ally, "only sis chucked a heap of pepper in his eyes. Wish I'd been there to hear him holler!"

Sally waved the interruption aside. "And then, if you please, Mr. Dawsey got the constable

and swore lies, and papa and mamma were away at Rowan Mountain, and he got that poor woman's two cows and the gun that her husband carried in the war, and she set the whole world by. And one of the poor cows died."

"But when papa got home, *he* fixed him," said Ally, with a grin.

"Yes, he did; he got a writ of *repletion* and the cows back, except one was dead; and it was her pet cow, too." Sally cried, her eyes growing bigger in her indignant sympathy, "but he did have to give up the gun and pay twenty dollars. So that was how he began to hate papa."

"Oh, they've had a heap of lawsuits since," said Ally. "Cobbs says he's lost nearly 'bout two thousand fighting pa."

"He's powerful mean, too," said Sally, solemnly. "There was an old colored woman wintered a hen with him, and, when she came for the hen, he said the bill was twenty-five cents, though he promised to keep her for the eggs, and when she offered him the hen for the bill ('cause she's so poor she always has to buy shoes too large for her, 'cause they don't wear out so soon) why, then he wouldn't take it. He made her give him ten cents to boot."

Cecil tried to restrain his laughter, but seeing

the colonel's shaking shoulders was too much; he laughed aloud and merrily.

"That's right, boy," said the colonel; then, more gravely: "The worst thing the fellow does is loaning out money to poor farmers and merchants on mortgages, wheedling them into believing that he will wait several years longer than specified in the note, and then jumping down on the instant there is a day's delay of interest or the time runs out, when, like as not, relying on his promise to renew, they haven't the money."

A number of tales followed, bearing on this trait of Dawsey. Cruel enough, too, some of them were, with piteous hints of blasted hearthstones and years of denial and struggle, to end only in ruin.

And there were darker shades to the picture of the Mean Man of the community. Dawsey was no native Arkansan. A bubble in the scum of rapine and murder that war whirls in its caldron, he had been swept into Arkansas with the retreating Missouri army.

Beginning as a sort of sutler, or camp-kite, he remained in the valley a guerrilla, or kite at large.

He belonged to the infamous Dick Barnabas band. Black River people had a saying that he could never meet old Colonel Rutherford, the exter-

minator of the guerrillas, without his neck growing red under the twist of an imaginary rope.

"So you see," said Colonel Seyton, smiling, "Dawsey isn't any too squeamish to undertake such a job. He knows how timid the darkeys are, too, and that I am drawn on the grand jury, and have to be off to the Rock to-morrow. It's a scheme, sure enough. Still, he may be as innocent as I am. Here's his place."

He pointed to the right, where a wide cotton-field shouldered its brown rows out of the swamp.

The ragged stalks were spattered with white from the "last picking" of cotton. A narrow road had been cut clumsily through the field, disappearing behind a row of mulberry-trees. The black, gambrel-roofed house, large apparently, yet either windowless or having barred shutters, therefore the more lonely and forbidding of aspect, gloomed behind the trees. It owned a gallery, but about this gallery was none of the hospitable disorder of the country—no meal-sacks, no saddles, no guns. It might have been a deserted house, for any show of life it gave. A broken chimney leaned perilously away from the walls.

Yet there were signs of habitation: half a dozen gaunt cows in the road, a cackle of poultry in the

barn-yard, some sharp-backed, black swine grunting through the tousle of dead plantain weeds, that, perhaps, had been a garden, and between the mulberry-trees and the road a fire of brush, over which was suspended the huge iron kettle of the South.

While they looked—for Alan had checked the horses—a brown horse, with a white face, rose up behind the fence. "Look at him, all covered with mud, and his hair roughed," said Ally; "looks like he was out last night."

The horse hung a dejected head over the fence, and turned an incurious, weary eye upon them.

"I reckon," said the colonel.

Cecil noticed that a little human figure had crept into sight from behind the iron pot. It was a boy's figure, barefooted, bareheaded—the hair was white, and tossed by the wind—clothed, hardly covered, by a tattered suit of brown jeans. The child's face, one could see, was thin and pale, but he had eager blue eyes, that stared at the wagon.

"Howdy, Larry?" shouted Ally.

"Howdy, Larry?" said Sally, nodding.

"Howdy, boy?"—this was from the colonel—"come on over." The boy darted a timid look at the house; but he came. He slid one foot up and

down his other leg and stared furtively at the children.

"Cooking your breakfast?" said the colonel.

"Naw, sir. Makin' soap." He had a melancholy, thin little voice. One would say that he was not older than ten.

"What did you have for breakfast, Larry, anyhow?"

"Nary. Hain't had breakfas'," said Larry.

"Well—*sir!*"

"He," jerking his little spear of a thumb over his shoulder, "he ain't up yit."

"Why? Up late last night at a festival?" said the colonel, grimly; and then, repenting of questioning a child, he held out a quarter.

"Well, good-morning, boy; come and see us, if your uncle will let you.—Go on, Ally."

But Ally was rummaging in that bewildering pocket of his; he emerged finally, triumphant, with a hard biscuit, a demoralized slice of cake, and a black lump of gum.

"There," was Master Ally's breathless comment, "put the cracker in, for myself, and took the cake home for ma. May be you can make out for a breakfast with that. The gum's store-gum—fine—good catch!—G'lang, you 'Rufa."

This time the horses did go—rapidly.

"Oh, laws!" was the single answer of the boy; but he stood still, not attempting to eat, watching the wagon until it was out of sight.

"The rest of the road is all good; it's on our plantation," said Sally.

It was good; a fact perceptible in the speed of the horses.

Soon cabins and farm-houses appeared, then the school-house and the store; at last the high bank of the river, and over the river, among the wooded hills, Cecil could see the tall columns and carved pediment of the porch, the spacious white walls and gabled roof of "the big house."

The ferry was waiting for them—a flat-boat on a wire rope, with a grinning negro boatman.

Colonel Seyton instantly demanded the news, receiving Aunt Valley's story with divers inflations and adornments, and one important omission: Rufe did not know of any one being killed.

Across the ferry, they drove swiftly up the winding avenue of live-oaks, and at the house-door a slender lady, with a sweet smile and bright dark eyes, took Cecil into her soft arms and kissed him.

"The dear boy! How glad we are to have you! How much he looks like his father!" she said.

CHAPTER IV.

THE FIRST DAY.

Cecil was awakened the next morning by a flood of golden light and a rattle of sticks on the hearth.

For a moment all he could see was a plaided back, and a woolly head framed by the flames that Vance was blowing. He awoke with that dizzy sense of dejection which comes to any one who has forgotten a trouble in sleep, as soon as his oblivion is broken.

"Oh, yes," he muttered, "I'm here, and dad is gone!"

The interest that he had taken yesterday in the novel surroundings, the queer excitement that had met him, the pleasure of distributing his gifts, and the flattery of welcome—somehow, all had dropped flat. Yesterday there was a kind of romance about the old mansion built before the war. One pictured a rude, half-feudal magnificence belonging to those

old days when every guest was offered his valet and his horse, as he is offered his hot water in the morning nowadays. Cecil was fond of reading stories of knights and ladies and tourneys. He had (although he kept it shyly to himself) a great notion of chivalry. He wished that he had been born in time to follow Richard the Lion-hearted to Palestine. *He* wouldn't have run away from him. Never! Last night there was a faint reminder of his dreams in the stories that he heard. The slaves might serve for retainers, and there were real battles fought within riding distance, where men had been killed; and a duel, and a ghost, and a beautiful distracted lady, with her hair down, figured in the legends. Altogether, Cecil was a good deal cheered; life was not going to be so commonplace, after all. He was amused at the plantation store; he thought the old gin picturesque; he was flattered by Alan and Sally's obvious admiration.

"It's not half bad, though everything is awfully shabby," thought Master Cecil, condescendingly.

But, this morning—how bare the big room looked! Its careful neatness could not hide the weather-blotches on the odd old wall-papers, the sunken bricks of the fireplace, the clumsiness of the iron fire-dogs, or the lack of furniture. There were

prints from illustrated papers, tastefully enough framed in glossy manila paper with brass tacks, grouped on the wide expanse of wall. The prints were well chosen, the effect was pretty, but the young critic could tell at a glance that they were woodcuts and not etchings; hadn't he brought a fine Van Elten to Mrs. Seyton and explained to Sally what a remarque proof was! I fear Mr. Seyton himself did not know before.

He was aroused by Vance's trundling in a bath-tub and depositing a steaming bucket of water on the carpet, with a cheerful irresponsibility as to the result for the carpet, possible only to a negro.

"Mis' Seyton 'lows ye' like to wash yo'seff like Mist' Ally and missy," said Vance, giving Cecil a view of all his ivory.

He spent an hour, later, describing to the group in the kitchen (who quite forgot breakfast in their interest) the amazing splendors of the guest's toilet arrangements, his silver-backed brushes, his sponges, his towels, his glass bottles "dat ben cut plum ober like a waffle."

So impressed was Vance, indeed, that he had fits of abstraction during breakfast, in which he was lost to all outside sounds, gazing and grinning at Cecil.

Cecil was only conscious that the service was very queer, particularly when the angry notes of a woman's voice and a sound of thumps and whacks, followed by stifled howls, came in through the passage-way after Vance had retired.

"Only Aunt Cindy training Vance," the colonel observed, dryly; "he was uncommonly inattentive this morning."

The table, Cecil thought, was on a level with the service. He searched his memory of other houses for such cheap crockery or for plated silver; yet, here and there, an exquisite cut glass dish and one Sèvres plate mingled with the common ware.

"They lost all their silver in the war," sagely concluded Cecil, "and they aren't rich enough to buy more." He pitied them sincerely, if with a dash of condescension in his pity. Really they were, on the whole, very well-bred people, though —what was it that amusing Englishman called the funny Western Congressman?—provincial! Yes, the Seytons were provincial.

Meanwhile, he politely praised Aunt Cindy's corn-dodgers, eating more than he wished.

The unconscious colonel smiled on him well pleased, and Mrs. Seyton studied his face with affectionate eyes, thinking: "He is just like John. I

wish he hadn't that supercilious mouth, like Nellie Hopkins, but it is John's honest, bright smile."

The talk, of course, turned on the news of yesterday. Early as it was, Colonel Seyton had been out, riding about the plantation, investigating matters, for two hours. His interviews and explorations had confirmed Aunt Valley's wild tale in the main, except as to Aunt Pearl Hotchkiss, whom he found in robust health, and mightily surprised to be told of her own tragic end. But she too had heard the marauders. They had "swarmed outer the woods, rarin' an' chargin'." She reckoned there been nearly 'bout a hundred of them—anyway, four or five—"'kase de swag groun' by de pig-pen ben all tromped up."

None of the victims had been hurt. But all were scared beyond sensible speech; and not one of them had patched together his courage enough to ride to "de big house" with the news that night.

It was afternoon ("evening" in the Southern parlance) before they had made their way to the store—some of them already prepared for departure. At the store the colonel found a flock of them, on his return, all in such a state of consternation and excitement that he spent the evening calming them. He had not come home until almost daybreak.

"And here I am, forced to go off this morning," he exclaimed, with a most unusual irritation, "This comes of trying to be a good citizen; and not get off the grand jury when I'm drawn. *You* will have to make out the best you can, Emily.—What's the matter, Vance?"

Vance had a folded paper in his hand, and a look of solemn importance on his apish visage.

"Please, sah, Mist' Morgan he got a telegraph fum de Ridge by de telephone. He done writ it out an' sen' it hup by Lishe. Hit fo' Mis' Seyton, he say, an' he ticklar 'bout she git it."

The colonel snatched the paper to read the dispatch, which he instantly handed to his wife, with a loud exclamation.

Cecil admired beauty in woman. His mother was a pretty woman, who considered herself a beautiful one, in which belief she had plenty of encouragement. He had heard discussions of famous beauties' looks, ever since he was a little fellow in a velvet suit, leaning against his mother's knee and staring at the fine ladies over the tea-tray. He wondered to himself if mamma would call Cousin Emily handsome. At any rate, she had fine eyes and a beautiful, clear skin; and there was something that won him, something like the cameos and stat-

ues, in her broad, low forehead, the way her hair grew back from her brow, and the marking of her eyebrows. While he stared, a flush and a pallor swept over the sweet face.

"Dick, I must go with you," said she.

There was an almost imperceptible inclination of Colonel Seyton's head in Cecil's direction.

"I shall leave everything with Sally," said Mrs. Seyton, smiling.

Cecil thought that she had a beautiful smile.

"I am sure Sally will manage everything," she went on, "and there's Aunt Cinda to see they don't starve and the house doesn't get afire. Indeed, Dick, there's no other way; I must go with you."

"Go where?" cried Alan, in blunt dismay; while Sally clasped her hands on the table-edge, growing paler.

"Your Aunt Ernestine is very sick—she is afraid she will die; and the doctor has sent for me."

Sally's eyes grew bigger and bigger, and her cheeks grew paler; but Alan did not show much emotion.

He filled his mouth with waffles before he remarked: "O Aunt Ernestine! She's always 'lowing she's going to die. She got all her kin up to

Little Rock, last September, 'cause she was going to die; and she never did die at all."

"She is a very sick woman, the doctor says, and he asks me to come," said Mrs. Seyton, quietly. "I don't think my boy would want me to refuse."

"Yes, ma'am, I would, every time," said Alan, morosely.

"I had depended on you for this other affair," said Colonel Seyton.

"You will have to do as you suggested to me this morning," said Mrs. Seyton.

She smoothed away all objections, somehow, so quietly that it hardly seemed that she did it, but rather as if the objectors had thought better of their minds themselves.

Cecil scarcely realized that she was going—remembering the confusion of hurrying servants, the bustle of leave-taking that attended his own mother's departures—until he saw her standing in her traveling-dress, in the great dingy hall, and could hear the negro driver scolding his horses. A moment later only the sound of wheels on the gravel returned to them: the planter and his wife were gone.

"Well, I'm glad Cobbs ain't gone, too," growled Ally. "I 'most wish Aunt Ernestine *would* die and

be done with it! She's always dying." A strong sense of injury grew on him with the remembrance, as he continued: "Say, Cecil, what do you think she did when she came to visit mamma, who, she always says, is her favorite niece? She said I could have a birthday party. She proposed it, and she was going to give me a cake and send to the Rock for ice-cream, truly store ice-cream, in a shape. She's got heaps of money, so she don't care. And, if you please, after the plumb lot of 'em got here, she up and begins dying, and then I had to send every one of 'em home, and the doctor came and—and"—Ally's voice was choked at the dire climax—"Vance and Judy had just got the ice-cream out of the mold, you know, t' fetch it in, and they set it down to make haste to get her medicines and projict round for her; and that fool Vance set it down on the stove and it *plumb melted!* Ugh! I like Cobbs a heap better. Cobbs says he don't want to die till he must, and then he'll be dead long enough."

"Who is Cobbs?" said Cecil.

Sally explained that Cobbs had been their father's orderly during the war, and was now the plantation blacksmith. But his gifts were not confined to the forge. Having been apprenticed to a butcher, he made admirable sausage-meat; and

having served a winter in a confectioner's shop, he knew how to freeze ice-cream and decorate cake. He was a fair carpenter, to the bargain, and mended tin-ware.

"There ain't anything in this world Cobbs can't do if he sets his mind on it," declared Ally, stoutly. "Say, there's no school; let's go and see him."

Cecil was ready enough for the walk, so the three sallied forth in search of Cobbs.

He was not at the smithy. The helper told them that he had gone to see a sick horse (Cobbs was, likewise, a horse-doctor) at the gypsy camp.

To the gypsy camp, accordingly, they followed Cobbs, walking along the high bank overlooking a cypress slash.

The canvas wagons, the jaded and rough-coated horses, the blazing camp-fire, and a group of tawny, black-haired children, with enough bits of scarlet and yellow to make their rags picturesque, very soon, told them the situation of the camp.

A little to the right, a drowsy-looking, muzzled bear was being led up and down by a chain in the hands of a woman. He walked wretchedly on his hind legs, every now and then dropping on all-fours, when the woman would scold him and hit him with a stick. A man lay on the ground, prop-

ping his head on his hands and smoking a pipe. Occasionally he would give some gruff direction to the woman.

Cecil surmised that the only white man visible, who was rubbing some kind of liniment on a horse's shoulder, must be the oft-quoted Cobbs. He had expected a giant, but here stood only a round-shouldered, little, thin man, in shabby jeans, with a drooping black mustache and restless, merry black eyes.

Ally hailed him joyously: "Say, Cobbs!"

And Cobbs came forward. He frankly held out his hand at Ally's introduction: "O Cobbs, here's my cousin Cecil, Cousin John Raimund's boy, you know."

"Well, I reckon," said Cobbs; "hope you're well; and how's you' paw?"

There was nothing for Cecil to do but to shake hands with this unpleasantly familiar person, who would have been shown round to the kitchen at home. He felt an inward squirm of disgust; but he bowed civilly, smiled faintly, and answered that his father was well.

"I used to know him, you know," said Cobbs, "a right smart while afore *you* did, I reckon. The cunnel an' me, we nussed him through a mighty

lively fever. Looked like he'd give up some days; but he didn't."

"My father has told me about that time," said Cecil; "he gave me a gun for you. I'm very much obliged to you, too," added the boy, rather awkwardly.

"He's always sendin' of me things," said Cobbs. "I ain't quit wantin' to thank him fur one thing afore another lands on me. And I never did nuthin' special for him neither. Well, I *wud* like to see him; ain't he comin' to these pyarts, think?"

"When he comes back from Little Rock, may be," said Cecil. ("Oh, if that were only to-morrow!" he thought.)

"Well, that's splendid. I'll do my best fur you while he's gone. Show ye the kentry and the sports."

By way of seeing the sports, Cecil inquired about the gypsies and their bear. Cobbs told him that the gypsies, every autumn, passed through the Black River country on their way farther south.

They would camp for a week or two in the sheltered ground by the river. During this time they gathered a few dollars by trading mules and horses, the men mending pots and kettles sometimes, and the women telling fortunes. If they had a bear

with them, they exhibited his tricks by firelight, at night; and the neighborhood flocked to see, for amusements were scarce in this primitive society, and valued accordingly.

"But don't they steal?" asked Cecil, whose ideas of gypsies were about equally lurid and vague. He knew that they stole children and chickens; but, for fear of ridicule in case he should be wrong, he wasn't going to be too definite.

Cobbs laughed good-naturedly. Oh, sometimes a fence was short a rail or two, he said, or there didn't appear to be quite as many chickens running around; but, generally speaking, no, sir, *he* called them honest.

"And you don't 'low they had anything to do over there?" It was Ally who spoke up now; and, as he spoke, he lowered his voice and jerked his thumb, forestward, over his shoulder.

Cobbs might have answered had there not occurred a very curious interruption. Down the steep bank a big mule came, leaping and stumbling, and galloped up to the woman with the bear.

The mule's rider was an elderly man, short, but very strongly built, whose gray hair was long enough to blow in the wind, and whose sallow face

was clean shaven. He wore a slouch hat and a suit of cheap clothes, whole and passably clean. There was nothing striking in his appearance except the look of fury in his face. As he rode, he lashed his mule with a cruel thorn-tree branch. He reined in the beast. In a loud tone he demanded (it might be of the woman, it might be of the man), "Where ye put my boy?"

The woman began a voluble disclaimer, but the man interrupted her. "We don't a steal no boys," said he; "there ben a half-starved boy coma here, get somfin to eata. We no keep him, Mista Dawsey."

Like a flash the man had jumped from his mule and darted round the tent. A shriek met him.

The woman and man exchanged glances. There was a touch of pity in the woman's.

The man muttered something in Italian. Only Cecil understood that he said: "No use. It would get us into trouble."

Almost instantly Dawsey reappeared, dragging after him the same forlorn little boy whom Cecil had seen the day before. The man was lashing the child savagely with the thorn-branch. He seemed beside himself with rage.

The child hung limply on his arm, neither strug-

"Quit, ye fools!" he bawled.

gling nor crying, until his wild eyes fell on the children. As if animated by new strength, the fierce little creature wrenched his head free, and with a swift movement, like that of a rat, sank his teeth into the arm that held him.

The pain made Dawsey relax his hold. Before his free fist could clinch and strike, the boy was flying across the "slash."

Dawsey ran after him. It may be more correct to say that he started to run after him, for Ally Seyton, perceiving the situation, so deftly interposed a foot that Dawsey lost his balance and sprawled into the camp fire; whereupon Ally made off one way as fast as Larry was going another.

Old Dawsey, raging, vowing horrors for Larry, of which murder was the kindest, picked himself out of the coals and would have given chase.

"Stoppa, stoppa, man!" shouted the gypsy; "you alla fire!"

Cobbs scooped a panful of soft mud and flung on the burning clothing, an example energetically followed by the gypsies, until the last sign of fire was smothered, and Dawsey was an amazing sight.

"Quit, ye fools!" he bawled. Again he set off after Larry, but this time Cobbs laid a hand on his arm. "Let the boy 'lone, will ye!" said Cobbs.

"We all up t' the store got suthin' t' ax of ye. Whar was ye, night afore las'?"

"Lemme go! I was home, as I always am."

But there had been a tell-tale start that Cecil at least, had noticed. "I believe he is lying," he said in a low voice to Sally.

Sally all this time was a quiet but deeply interested observer. She nodded.

Dawsey twisted his spattered face and turned his one eye (I fear it was malice made Cobbs fling the cake of mud that had fast closed the other) on the girl and boy.

He gave them a murderous glance, although he did not speak a word.

Sally shrank a little; Cecil returned him a look of contempt.

"Come, now," Cobbs went on, "folkses are talkin' a right smart 'baout you, Mist' Dawsey. Say ye ben ridin' raound skeerin' up the colored people. Reward's aout of a hundred dollars; an' cunnel he done gone t' the Rock t' git the Governor issue a proclamation, an' offer a reward. Ye better show whar ye went—an' how come ye didn't git back till nigh sun-up."

Dawsey winced, but repeated doggedly that he hadn't been away from home, that week. Who had

seen him?—that is, correcting himself, who dared to pretend to have seen him?

"And you didn't go off down the Summer road to the turn, hay?" said Cobbs; "you' plum sure of that, and you didn't maybe meet up with two or three friends?"

"I didn't get outer my bed," Dawsey growled. "I don't know nothin' of no niggers, an' I don't wanter.—A-r-r! Huh!" This to the mule, which was fidgeting. He jumped on the beast's back, threw a look of sullen anger around the circle, and galloped away into the swamp.

"He can't catch Larry, now," said Sally, with a sigh of relief.

"But isn't Larry his son?" asked Cecil.

Larry, however, was not so unfortunate, although he was, in the eye of the law, Dawsey's son, because he had been legally adopted by the old man on the death of his sister, Larry's mother. Why he adopted the boy had long puzzled the Seytons. Mrs. Seyton, who had been to see "the widow Harkness" during her last sickness, and had carried her stealthily many a little luxury, said that his demeanor at that time was more human. He had cared for and protected his sister, after a fashion, although there was a horrible rumor that he had

killed her husband. There was no doubt that he hated Rufe Harkness, nor that there had been furious quarrels between the two. And Rufe Harkness was shot on the roadside by an unknown assassin.

Still, he was not unkind to his sister. He relaxed his miserliness enough to give her a rude plenty. She was well clothed. In her day, meal-sacks and salted pork were seen in the gallery. The boy Larry went, neatly clothed, to school. A present or two was sent for him to the Christmas-tree. His lot did not seem so much harder than other lads', if his uncle did scowl on him and sometimes give him a sly cuff as well as a curse.

But, with his mother's death, all was changed. Dawsey went out from the dead woman's presence to one of his rare fits of drunkenness.

He had shown hints of feeling during her sickness, and before she died he solemnly promised, in Mrs. Seyton's presence, to care for the child as his own. He did go so far as to take out papers of adoption. Perhaps he thus satisfied his conscience, for here any kindness to Larry ended.

No more school; hard work all the days of the week—hard work and poor fare; and, every day, the clothes, that his mother used to keep so tidy, getting raggeder.

At first, Dawsey was not actively brutal. He kept the boy from school, worked him harder than an ox, and fed him barely; he was morose in his manners, scolded at any pretext, and made biting speeches without pretext; but he did not beat Larry. Of late, however, his bad temper had grown on him; and passers-by told of shrieks in a child's voice and the sound of blows; and Larry had a black eye, often; once, too, his head was tied up, and when the cloth came off there remained an ugly scar.

Nobody knew of his complaining, not even to Alan Seyton, who was a childish hero of his. He was a quiet, patient lad. If there were gleams of spirit hid about him, nobody suspected them.

Something like this was the story Sally told Cecil. He was excited. Cobbs, who went home with them, looked grave, saying that he didn't like the looks of things; people talked very "severe" against old man Dawsey.

"They're afraid of him, though," said Alan. He had joined the company half-way home, and was trudging along unconcernedly as usual.

"Well, *you* ain't," Cobbs rejoined. And Ally grinned.

"I am," said Sally; "I'm 'fraid he'll do us an

awful meanness some time. Do you reckon he could set the house a-fire, Cobbs?"

"No, sure, missy," said Cobbs.

"I'd shoot him if he tried," said Cecil, laughing.

They went home in high good humor, as far as the boys were concerned; but Sally's tender heart fretted over Larry. Where was he? Had his cruel uncle found him? Was he in the dismal recesses of the swamp, cold and hungry?

She cudgeled her brains all that day, I am sure, to invent some plan of succor. And, truth to tell, the real reason she went out on the coon-hunt that evening, was from a vague, wild hope that they might find some trace of Larry.

Cobbs proposed the coon-hunt. He felt it on his conscience to amuse the guest; and a coon-hunt struck the old hunter as a peculiarly innocent, safe sport.

"Moonlight night, Ally," said he, winking; "'coons an' 'possum thick as hair."

"And we could take Henri," said Alan.

Cecil was feeling homesick again with the night-fall; he hailed any diversion.

Therefore, after supper, the moon being high in the heavens, they started on the coon-hunt.

A coon-hunt is a favorite Southwestern sport.

Moonlight is required for the hunters to see the coon, although sometimes a fire is built that gives enough light by which to sight a gun.

A dog is necessary to find the coon or 'possum —a dog that understands his business.

Henri IV, which, Sally explained, was their valued dog's name (given to him because of the white tuft on his forehead, the "white plume of Navarre"), was not an attractive beast at first sight.

He was a lank, sneaking-looking Arkansas hound that had lost one half of one lop ear in a fight and had half a dozen scars, as well. He trotted along in a curious, ungainly fashion, as if he were lame—which he was not—and resented the advances of strangers by showing a ragged row of teeth and growling.

"He really is right sweet-tempered," said Sally, "but when we go hunting he gets so excited he forgets his manners."

Cecil put Ally between him and the "right sweet-tempered" dog, which was sniffing suspiciously at his heels.

Ally was armed with a rifle as big as himself, Cecil carried a beautiful Greener, Sally bore an axe, and Cobbs had his new gun on his shoulder.

To do honor to the occasion, Cecil had donned his hunting-suit, which Cobbs eyed with vast but secret scorn. As for Sally and Alan, they wore their shabbiest clothes and rubber boots.

They walked very quietly through the forest, on the other side of the river.

In fifteen minutes they were out of sight of the lights.

About them was only a forest as grim, as dark, as wildly tangled with underbrush as when the axe of the first settler found it. Above them the full moon rolled in a steel-blue, starless sky.

Henri lumbered ahead, his nose to the ground.

He began to bark.

"He's found him," announced Ally.

The dog's clamor filled all the silent wood now; sharp, yelping barks. Away down a moonlit vista they could see him hurrying. His tail was straight in the air, stiff as a stick of wood.

Presently the barks changed. Howls, sharper barks, the outcry of delight, instead of anxiety, reached them.

"Treed him," said Ally.

"Shore," said Cobbs.

It was easy enough getting to the tree under which Henri was frantically barking. Not so easy,

Cecil lifted his gun.

Cecil thought, to see the 'possum hiding under the rusty foliage.

He was relieved to hear Alan announce the need of a fire.

They pushed dry leaves and twigs ("trash" Cobbs called them) into a heap, and very soon a ruddy flame leaped up, thin and high, like a huge candle. By that flickering glare they could see not only the tree, but a circle of woodland.

"Will you shoot?" said Ally to Cecil.

Cecil lifted his gun. High up in the tree he caught a glimpse of a line of gray fur. Ping! went the gun.

There was a rustle among the dead leaves. So true was the aim that the gray lump fell almost at their feet, and instantly Ally was beating off the dog.

"Good shot, Bud," said Cobbs. He used the Arkansas word for brother, or boy, very similar to our familiar "Bub."

Cecil regarded Cobbs coldly. What right had he, a mere servant, to be using such familiar terms? Nevertheless, he was not insensible to the sweetness of praise.

Honest Cobbs went on unconsciously: "Reckon we kin take you aout on a wil'-hog hunt, ayfter all.

Cunnel 'lowed 'twud be too rough riding; but the way you take hole things, I reckon you wudn't be skeered of a bit er cane."

"Oh, no," said Cecil, softening in spite of himself.

He received Ally's congratulations affably; then he looked around for Sally. After all, Sally was the one from whom he expected to receive the help and interest of companionship. But Sally had run a few paces ahead.

When she came back her first words were not for him.

"See what I found!" she cried, displaying what looked like a torn handkerchief.

"Well, it ain't worth finding," said Ally, bluntly.

"What be ye totin' it raoun fur, missy?" said Cobbs, in a different tone.

She held it up. "Don't you see?" As they were silent, she fitted it to her face. At once they exclaimed:

"It's a mask, by gum!" Ally cried.

"That's one of them tricks the fellers that frightened the niggers wore on thar faces," was Cobbs's conclusion, very solemnly uttered. "Whar ye foun' hit, missy?"

"By the big gum-tree," said Sally. "I saw it shining and I picked it up."

They all examined it. But only Cecil noticed that, while they were examining it, Sally uttered a suppressed exclamation. "Let me look at it," she said, taking it nearer the firelight. Afterward—but again only Cecil noticed it—she it was who put the handkerchief in her pocket.

"It's a clew," said Sally, with dignity, "and we have to preserve it.

All the word suggested to Ally was a thought of preserves, and so by an easy transition a disagreeable reminder of butter."

"Oh, say," he exclaimed, "we got to send for some butter."

Ally never troubled himself with the inconsequence of his remarks.

"Why, we have plenty of butter; Aunt Cindy churned to-day," said Sally.

"Well, it's just the same; she gave the churn to Vance," said Ally, easily, "you know that calf Pete just won't keep up in the yard; Vance heard the boat whistle and ran out to see it, and that calf, someway, he got at the churn—I heard Aunt Cindy just chastising of Vance 'bout it. She said all the butter was plumb spoiled."

Sally, the housekeeper, looked disturbed.

"He broke the churn, too," finished Ally, placidly. "I forgot to tell you that, and Aunt Cindy says not even Cobbs can mend it. Got to have a new churn, she says. Reckon we got to sop our bread in molasses for a while, like the niggers."

"I'll tell you suthin' else since you begun," said Cobbs. "The ice is all gone in the storehouse, and if we have a warm day to-morrow the meat will be gone tew.—Wa'al, Onery's off agin!"

Henri led them a long chase this time. As they tramped along in the moonlight, Cecil looked curiously at the 'possum swinging under Cobbs's hand.

He observed that it looked "like an overgrown rat"; but Cobbs, with a short chuckle, added "Wa'al, looks more like a monstrous big duck, t' my mind, when ye get that 'ar fur offen it."

He went on to tell how the negroes preferred 'possum to all other food. "Ye cayn't find a darkey won't take jes' natchelly to 'possum. But thar's a heap er ways in treatin' 'possum. The right way—ain't it, Br'er 'Possum?"—addressing the lump—"air to put you out on the roof couple o' nights, t' freeze. That's fustly; secondly, when we got the fishy taste outen ye, we kin bile ye very sof' an'

gentle, goin' on three, four hours, and then we put ye in a pan an' put in a little water, an' salt an' pepper ye right smart an' kiver ye with slices of raw sweet pertaters an' bake an' bake ye till you' plumb tender. Laws, ain't ye juicy an' rich then!"

Cobbs sighed over a retrospect of past delight. He patted the opossum affectionately.

"Bless ye, Br'er 'Possum, ain't nuthin' mean 'baout *you!* you make them taters taste nearly 'baout 's good 's you. Mymy, mymy! I seen the time when I got afore a right good-cooked 'possum, I eat so much I nearly made a founder."

Ally interrupted: "Say, Cobbs, look over yonder; there's a fire in the woods!"

Cobbs looked; he pursed his lips and frowned. "Thar had oughter be a cotton-picker's haouse tharabouts," said he, musingly. "Tain't a much good haouse, but I hate t' have ary property of the cunnel's burn daown while he's gone. I do so. Less git a glimpse of it."

Abandoning the 'coon or 'possum that Henri had found—poor dog, he was dancing about a tall tree "barking his head off"—they struck through the wood until they reached an ineffectual sort of clearing, in one corner of which stood a ruined cabin. There was no window, but all the chinks

and the doorway, to which no door pertained any longer, leaked a ruddy glow.

Yet in a second Cobbs motioned the others back, whispering: "Hush! 'tain't no fire; some one's inside. Come on slow and quiet like, an see."

When they were within a few rods of the house, Cobbs ran ahead.

He would not let Ally or the others accompany him. But in a moment he motioned for them to come on, at the same time placing his fingers on his lips to caution them to be silent.

Cecil began to be excited. Slowly they crept up to the house.

In obedience to a gesture from Cobbs, Ally placed himself on one side of the door.

The next moment a little ragged shape uncoiled itself out of a heap before the fire and stood straight up in the glow, staring at them with wild, scared eyes.

"Larry!" cried Sally.

Larry, indeed, it was; and his relief (when he discovered their identity) was no less than their surprise.

It appeared that he had sprained his ankle in his race through the woods. Nothing better could

be done than to hide himself for the night in whatever shelter he could find.

"When it come sun-up I 'lowed t' get over t' the big haouse an' see Ally," he mumbled.

"Ally," thought Cis; "he calls him Ally, and Ally doesn't care." In fact, Ally would have been surprised at any other mode of address.

"What was Dawsey mad at you for?" said he.

"'Cause he went off t' other night, and I lit the lamp," said Larry; "I got skeered up bein' left by my 'lone."

Cobbs chuckled. "Ah, he ben aout, did he? When, yestidday?"

"Naw, sir, day before yestidday night?"

"Whar did he go?"

"I dunno," said Larry, looking scared.

No questioning drew out any further information.

All this time poor Henri had been filling the air with vociferous yelps.

"I'll go back and kill the coon," said Sally, in the most matter-of-fact way; "please lend me your gun, cousin Cecil."

"No, let me, sis," said Ally; indeed, he was running across the wood before they could answer.

Cobbs and Sally and Cis all looked at Larry.

What should they do with him? He had subsided into his usual limp dejection, and evidently regarded his fate as shuffled off his own hands into theirs.

Finally, Sally, who had been knitting her brows in her anxiety, spoke: "Cobbs, we *have* to take him somewhere."

"To be shore, missy," said Cobbs.

"If we keep him at our house, Dawsey will find out."

"To be shore, missy," said Cobbs.

"Besides"—Sally's care-taking little frown deepened—"it may make trouble—about papa, you know."

"To be shore, missy," Cobbs agreed, with greater emphasis.

He turned on Larry. "Well, Bud, whar was ye 'lowin' t' go *you'seff*, hay?"

Larry fumbled with his miserable hat, and said he "ben 'lowin' to see Ally."

"I mout take him with *me*," said Cobbs, eying the ragged and squalid shape with a dubious expression. Cobbs was a tidy man.

"But you couldn't hide him," said Sally. "No, Cobbs; I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll take him to Aunt Valley's. She can hide him; and she will, too."

"I ben aimin' t' 'ax Ally if I hadn't bes' go t' Aunt Valley's," said Larry, meekly.

"Cay'nt tote ye thar, to-night," said Cobbs; "ye got t' wait an' go before sun-up."

There was a little more discussion, in which, to Cecil's amusement, Larry was not considered at all. It was decided that Cobbs should take the boy home with him. Cobbs lived alone. There would be no one to spy on his visitor, and, before the plantation was astir in the morning, Cobbs could have Larry safely stowed in a wagon-bed out of sight.

When Ally appeared with the coon, the plan was explained to him.

Ally wrinkled his eyelids over his eyes, half-shutting them in the funny way he had when deeply considering; and Cecil noticed that Larry seemed suddenly to awake out of his stupor, and was gazing eagerly at Ally.

"Humph! Yes, I reckon," said Ally.

"I knowed Ally would find a way fur me," said Larry, drawing a deep sigh of relief and admiration, and quite oblivious to the fact that it was Sally who had really suggested the way.

"But I better go with you, you know," said Ally, still considering.—"Say, sis, Cobbs has got to have *some* excuse for trapsin' over the country."

"Of course," said Sally. "Ally, how would it do for us all to go with Cobbs in the morning, right early? And then we can see if Aunt Valley hasn't some butter; and we can go on to the station and telegraph to Little Rock for some butter and ice to come on in the train, and we can arrange with Aunt Valley to go after it and fetch it in—that will save us a trip over the bad roads, now we need the horses hauling wood. What do you think?"

Ally grinned admiringly. "Well, sis, you have a heap of sense!—What do you say, Cecil? Would you like to go?"

Cecil had no mind for another trip over the roads; but there was no good excuse in sight, and he assented with apparent willingness.

"Then that's settled," said Ally; "there's only one thing left: Larry hasn't had any supper."

Cobbs agreed to give Larry some light bread and pork and milk before he went to bed; and he good-naturedly added that he would have some hot coffee ready for the young people in the morning.

"Save Aunt Cindy's bones for once," said he, winking jocosely; "she hates gittin' up wusser than sinnin—and she's mighty pious."

The matter being thus satisfactorily arranged, the little company took up its homeward march—Henri, very loath, accompanying them, howling occasionally over his disappointment.

Sally walked behind Larry, who was supported by Cobbs, for he was incapable of walking alone. He winced sometimes over a stumble, but did not utter a sound. Sally asked him if his ankle hurt him.

"Oh, 'tain't a much bad hurt," said he, patiently; "I don't mind it."

Sally was not satisfied. "Did you have anything to eat to-day?"

"Well, I did have some corn pone this mornin'."

"And nothing else?" said Cecil.

"Naw, sir; but onyhow he never does give me but two meals a day. Says what stunts folkses are overfeedin'. Jest makes 'em fat an' greasy; an' they doesn't grow endwise 'tall."

"Wa'al, dad gum my skin!" said Cobbs. "Ain't that man the beater?"

"Ain't he?" said Ally.

"He taken way them cloze my maw left me," said Larry, "an' my knife you guv me"—turning to Ally—"an' that ar handketcher, tew. Sayd them tricks pompered boys an' made 'em sassy."

There was no note of complaint in Larry's voice telling his tale; it was quite matter of fact.

"Did he treat you bad, Larry?" Ally asked. Ally was getting very furious, but Sally said never a word.

"He didn't uster treat me much bad, but lately he bin lickin' me a heap," said Larry, "an' I reckon he 'lows t' kill me now, he are so mad at me."

Even now there was no animation in his manner. But all at once he gave a dog-like glance at Ally, and added, "I reckoned if I cud git to Ally he wudn't let him."

"I'll shoot him first!" cried Ally.

Still Sally was silent.

They left Larry in Cobbs's care, Cobbs promising to give him something "heatin'" in addition to the bread and pork before he went to bed.

After they were home, the reason for Sally's silence appeared.

She shut the door of the room and drew closer to the two boys, who were warming their backs before the blazing fire.

In her hand was the handkerchief mask.

She held it up. "Don't you know it, Ally?" said she.

"Know it!" Ally repeated. But Cecil pointed

to a tiny inscription in the corner: "Alan R. Seyton."

"It's the handkerchief you gave Larry," said Sally, impressively, "the time he cut his head. Don't you see? Larry said he took his handkerchief. He took it to make a mask of."

"Shucks!" observed Ally.

"I don't reckon they had another handkerchief in the house," said Sally, "so he took this."

She folded the handkerchief carefully and put it back in her pocket. "That's what I call evidence," said she.

"May be, if we can prove that he took it and Larry didn't lose it," was the cautious Ally's conclusion. He would have taken it then, late as it was, over to Cobbs for advice; but Sally suggested that Larry's presence would interfere, and it was resolved to wait until morning.

"Well," thought Cecil, as he drew the bedclothes about him, half an hour later, "life here may be queer, but it certainly isn't stupid."

CHAPTER V.

AUNT VALLEY AGAIN.

Not a trace of red showed above the flat cypress-tops, but the sky had the wan, dissolving look that heralds the dawn, when the three children stole through the grove to Cobbs's cabin. Really, cabin is not a large enough name for a four-roomed, two-chimneyed, tight house, with a gallery (as the Southerners call their curious verandas that have the roof for cover, and extend between as well as in front of the rooms), but I am quoting from Cecil, who had a great notion of using the language of the country. Besides, four rooms didn't seem so large to him; and he didn't know the advantages of a tight house by experiencing the disadvantages of leaks in the roof or gaps in the weather-boarding.

Cobbs's house was neatly painted, and had a little garden in front, where a few chrysanthemums flaunted their yellow petals among the sweet-potato vines.

In the room to which the party were shown there was a paper on the walls and a carpet as well as four "animal rugs" on the floor. Each rug represented a different animal—tiger, wolf, lion, or elephant—giving the floor quite the vivid and thrilling effect of a circus poster.

For many years Ally had admired these rugs; hadn't he, indeed, given the very largest and brightest, the tiger rug, to Cobbs on Christmas? He pointed them out to Cecil with artless pride; he reckoned Cousin Cecil didn't see much finer rugs even in Chicago.

"They are very gay, indeed," Cis agreed, suppressing his feelings.

Yet, somehow, Sally looked troubled; she was not so sure as Ally that Cis didn't see finer rugs in Chicago.

"Look at the walls, too," Ally requested; "ain't those plow-pictures lovely, with the sky all round and the plow on top of the ball? That girl with the cap came with the starch, and that other girl's baking-powder. That's a funny one, ain't it, where they're scrubbing the little darkey white with the soap? That means soap will scrub everything on earth clean."

"Oh, does it?" said Cecil, dryly.

And again Sally winced.

Among the plows and the beauteous damsels that adorn starch and baking-powder—by wholesale packages—was a motley collection of daguerreotypes, tintypes, and photographs of Cobbs's "kin"; the faces very dark and severe, the hands and feet of extraordinary size, and all of the subjects having a general air of undergoing a surgical operation in their best clothes.

Cecil was an amateur photographer. He fell upon the poor smudgy things with cruel glee; but in a second his gaze lighted on another adornment that he found more entertaining than the photographs. This was no less than a "hair picture," representing a lank female, in scanty skirts, weeping over a funeral urn, in company with a very stunted willow and a singular fowl, that looked like a chicken, but presumably was intended for a dove. A message from the artist, on the lower right-hand corner of the picture, informed the world that it was "wove out of the hair of Obi T. Cobbs, died March 8, 1860, aged fifty-eight years, two months, five days.

"Willy C. Cobbs, his daughter, died July 2, 1863, aged fifteen years.

"Cassius R. Cobbs, his grandson, died February 15, 1864, aged eight months two days; and Sabra

H. Cobbs, his mother, died January 23, 1870, aged ninety years one month.

"By me, Temperance Ann Cobbs his widow," said the inscription.

While Cecil wondered if he dared express his amusement, Ally came to him and rubbed a finger softly over the glass.

"Cobbs's mother did that," said Ally; "it's all hair-work, but you can't see a bit sticking up anywhere. It's done so fine you'd 'most think it was lead-pencil, wouldn't you? The gray hair's Cobbs's father's and the black hair's his sister's and the whity yellow's the baby's. She was ten years making it; but then, she waited a sight of time for grandma Cobbs to die, 'cause she thought it would be nice to put *her* hair in for the urn."

"And what do you reckon?" Sally broke in. "Grandma Cobbs wanted her hair put in while she was *alive!* She said she did crave so to see how 'twould look and Tempe Ann (that was Cobbs's mother) could fill in the date of her death when she did die—'Cause course I will die *some time*,' she said, 'though I expect the Lord's most done forgot whar I be.'"

"Yes," Ally struck in, "and she took on so about it that Cobbs persuaded his mother to give

in to her; but we never talk about it, because Mrs. Cobbs never did like to let folks know. It's pretty, ain't it?"

"It took the prize at the fair," said Sally.

Both children were so solemn that Cecil strangled a laugh, and only asked gravely if Cobbs was married.

"No," said Alan; "he lives all alone, now his mother's in Texas. He was going to be married, once, ever so long ago before we were born; but his girl died."

"Is her picture here?"

"No, he never did have her picture; he's only just got a side-saddle of hers that he keeps and a book-mark in his Bible."

Cecil, with a faint awakening of interest in Cobbs, glanced at the Bible on the white marble-topped table of state, and wondered if it held the book-mark.

Ally would have enlarged on Cobbs's romance, had not his sister hushed him.

"Yon comes Cobbs with the coffee and Larry," she whispered.

Cobbs looked very much the same, but Larry was transformed. Meeker and limper, and smaller than ever in a suit of Ally's old clothes, he hobbled

in and disappeared in the depths of the big red rocker.

"Why, Larry Harkness," cried Sally, "if you haven't had your hair cut! How nice you look!"

"And I ben washed plumb over, tew," Larry returned, "in a tub; Mist' Cobbs holped me, same like maw uster."

"Well, did it hurt?" said Cecil, and Cobbs chuckled; but Larry fixed his great, solemn eyes on the Northern boy and answered impassively, "Naw, sir, not much bad."

"Well, you look right nice now," Sally repeated.

Larry looked wistfully at Ally. "Does *you* 'low I look nice, tew?" said he.

"Never saw you look so nice before," said Ally. "Here, have another lump of sugar in your coffee."

"Then I'll wash in Aunt Valley's tub, ever' week!" said Larry, stoutly; "onyhow, 'tain't so bad as lickin's."

The little outcast did not seem to make any doubt of his welcome by Aunt Valley; but then, as Cecil reflected, no more did any of the others.

Whether it was the keen air, or Cobbs's cookery, he found Cobbs's corn dodgers and coffee delicious.

There was even a little pat of butter left in Cobbs's own pantry. They ate by lamplight. Cobbs had lavishly lighted both his two lamps and a candle (for which an impromptu candlestick had been carved out of a potato), but before the meal was finished the first pale rays of the sun were creeping through the white curtains.

The wagon and Cobbs were ready. Cobbs cleared the table, helped by the children and Larry, and deftly stacked the dishes in a great pan filled with water.

"I jest do hate to have dishes all messed and gummed up like they git by standin'," said Cobbs. "Well, pile in, gentlemen an' ladies."

Rufe was in waiting at the ferry, and they set forth, Ally in front with Cobbs, Cecil and Sally behind. As for Larry, he was stowed away lengthwise in the wagon-bed, under the robe, not a scrap of him visible.

Never a murmur did the creature make while they drove through the sleeping plantations, until Cecil began actually to fear that he was suffocated, he was so quiet.

A few lights, springing up in the low windows, showed that work was beginning with the day. The last house passed, Ally hailed the exile from

air, under the robe: "Come on out, Larry! Aren't you terrible choked and stiff?"

"Laws, no," said Larry; "I ben 'sleep."

Sally beguiled the way with legends of the road.

Dismal enough they seemed to be, most of them: to the right, beside that blasted cypress-trunk, white as dead bones, a Federal scout had been shot by an unknown assassin; and there, in the self-same place, had the man who was suspected of the crime sunk in the mire and perished miserably.

"Why, is the mud so deep as all that?" said Cecil, astonished.

"Well, skeercely," said Cobbs. "You see, he fell face for'ard, an' he ben so blamed drunk he didn't know 'nuff to git up. That's 'baout the size of it."

"An' daown thar in the swag," piped up Larry, moved to contribute to the general entertainment, "my paw ben killed. They all fund jest his boots sticking up. He had got," said Larry, with modest pride, "three turrible bullet-holes in him."

"How old were you then, Larry?" Sally asked, looking pitifully at the unconscious child.

"Oh, I kin remember it right well; I ben risin' of five."

"Who killed him, Larry?" Cecil questioned, out of sheer curiosity, to see if the boy had any sus-

picion of the cruel gossip afloat. He was amazed at Larry's answer, given in the most matter-of-fact manner:

"Most folkses 'lows Uncle Dawsey done it."

"And you go on living with him!" cried Cecil, who for once forgot his politeness, in a burst of horror at the situation.

"I didn't got nowhar else to live," said Larry, stoically. But in a minute his chin quivered, and Cecil could see how tightly his little, claw-like hands were gripping the robe.

"I ain't aimin' to furgit it," said he, in a strained voice.

Ally patted his shoulders—consoling him after his boyish fashion.

"Never you mind, Larry. You don't need to go back to him, *never!* We all will look out after you now."

"To be shore, Bud," said Cobbs.

Cecil tried to retrieve his mistake by giving Larry a dollar. It was a shock to have him flatly refuse it. "I ain't done nuthin' fur ye," says Larry.

"Oh, that dosen't matter," Cecil returns, with a lordly air; "keep it. You're welcome to it."

But Larry flushed all over his pale face, and muttered, "I ain't a-beggin'."

"Well, you can give it to Aunt Valley"—Sally hastened to the rescue—"she'll like it."

"I never saw such touchy people as Southerners," thought Cecil. By this time they were come to the bad road, hence there was plenty of other occupation for his thoughts.

They soon discerned Aunt Valley perched on a white heap of cotton above four wheels, driving two of her mules. Hauling, in fact, was one of Aunt Valley's main sources of revenue. This was not her own cotton, but the load of a neighbor.

She hailed Cobbs volubly; were they all going on? Road turrible bad, turrible bad. All at once (she was now abreast of them) her faded eyes fell on Larry. She nearly fell off her wagon, so violently did she start. "How come ye fotch dat boy t' me?" she screamed. "I nev' did know nuthin' 'bout dat boy. Dawsey's kin! I nev' did part lips wid him.—G'way, Dawsey's boy!"

She was so frantic that it seemed strange to see Larry's composure, as he stood up, laughing and shouting: "Oh, it's all right, Aunt Valley! I done runned away from the old man, an' Ally fotched me to you. It's all right for shore!"

"How come ye runned away frum you' own uncle?" growled Aunt Valley, still unappeased.

Sally noticed how her hands twitched at the reins, and her eyeballs rolled. She went on, in a mutter, "I ain't succorin' no runaways, dat's sho'!"

"Oh, well, Aunt Valley," said Larry, no whit dismayed by her ungraciousness, "I are jest natchelly bleeged to throw myseff on *you*—kase you kin hide me."

"Yes, Aunt Valley, you *must*," said Sally, decidedly.

"Sure, Aunt Valley," said Ally.

"I reckon you got to give in, Aunt Valley," said Cobbs, grinning; "dessay you'd ruther not, but we all cayn't allus have our ruthers, in this worl'. Will I h'ist him in?"

But here Larry took matters into his own hands by scrambling down, lame as he was.

Ally leaped after him into the mud, and so helped him to Aunt Valley's wagon.

The negress made no further demur, unless it were demurring to declare before the Lord that boys "wored her to a frazzle"; and she didn't see how she "ben going to slew her mules round" in that "mash."

However, with Cobbs's assistance she did contrive to turn in safety, so that she might take Larry back home with her.

There she proposed to leave him while she should carry the cotton to the gin.

She was quite willing to wait until she could go to the station for the Seytons' ice and butter. "Ain't no call to make tew haulin's of it," she grunted. "Mist' Coffin, he ain't mistrustin' de cotton ain't gone aready."

"That's so," said Cobbs, cheerfully, "an' what the mind don't know the hairt caynt grieve."

Aunt Valley bestowed a grim sort of leer and a nod on the moralist. "Well, you isn't a fool *all* de time," was her rather dubious form of approval. —"G'lang you, Melodion! *Huh!* My Lawd, I does got de rheumatiz so pow'ful bad I'se in a heap er mizry dis day!"

Thus, mumbling and moaning (with occasional fin-like dives of one hand to rub her afflicted back), she fell into the rear; and the children drove away.

Cecil was concerned lest some one should see Larry. Ally reassured him. "Needn't be 'fraid of that, Cousin Cecil; Aunt Valley's right sharp; she'll hide him, My my! you had ought to hear the stories Uncle Hobson used to tell of her tricks when he was here."

"Ally," said his sister, "you say *had ought*, all

the time, now mamma's gone, and ain't, and—everything."

"Oh, well" (Ally was not at all disturbed), "I'll quit when she comes home. It's such a nuisance studying 'bout your talk all the time. And she can't hear me when she's 'way. What the mind don't know the heart can't grieve, as Cobbs says."

"Oh, but Ally," his sister persisted, "you know it isn't to please mamma; it's—it's to be like a gentleman."

"Oh, well, I'll talk straight by and by."

"You'd orter talk straight now, right spang off," Cobbs struck in emphatically. "Bymeby's got a lame foot, an' never gets thar till to-morrow."

With such wise saws did Cobbs interlard his talk; and it must be confessed he edified Ally, if no one else.

The little boy wrinkled his eyelids and looked sober for the space of full five minutes—so sober that Sally eyed him wistfully.

I wonder how much a craving to have Cecil understand that Ally's slipshod ways of speaking were "only in fun" because he was careless, not at all because he didn't know better, had to do with her reproof? Poor Sally! her tender con-

science smote her sore, now, for "putting on airs" and mortifying Ally.

"I talk just like Ally," she hastened to say; "it's so easy when everybody about us talks wrong" —here, she checked herself with a distressed look at Cobbs, who had his chance to be "mortified" now. "Of course, I don't mean *very* wrong," she stammered, "only not just—just like the sentences to be parsed in the grammar, you know."

"I call it plumb wrong the way we uns talk," Cobbs interfered, with the utmost cheerfulness, although he had to sacrifice a large quid of tobacco in order to speak just then; "but laws, missy, what does it matter? We uns ain't quality, nor we ain't going to Congress."

"Talking about the way people talk," said Cecil, really moved to help Sally, who was a nice little thing, he thought, "do you know, I don't understand at all so many words? Now, that old black woman, she said boys wore her to a frazzle. What's a *frazzle*, pray?"

"Oh, a frazzle?" said Ally; "why, it's just—a frazzle! When you are worn to a frazzle, you're all worn out, you understand."

"Yarn gets into a frazzle sometimes," Sally said, thoughtfully; "it's like a frouzle, I expect."

"Well, I think I understand anyhow," Cecil said, "it's expressive, isn't it? But there's another word: I heard your black boy Vance talking about our horses being *ill*, and when I asked him what was the matter, he said: 'Oh, just meanness; the cold air made them feel so fine, they liked to jump and caper.' I really don't see how sick horses can like to jump and caper."

"Laws!" said Cobbs, "they ain't *sick;* they're peart as peart. Ill don't mean sick."

"It means cross," said Sally, "ill-behaved."

"And I know plumb means quite, and study means to think. Oh, I shall learn the language directly."

"I'll bet you will, Bud," Cobbs laughed; "you', the son er a mighty smart man, an' you'll make out."

Strangely enough, Cobbs had taken a great fancy to Cecil. He took pains as they plowed heavily along, with plenty of time before each tree, to expound his woodland lore to the boy, showing him how to distinguish trees by their bark us well as foliage, and telling many thrilling tales of the wild creatures that used to possess the forests.

"Bar's, they're plumb gone, hereabouts—an' painters," said Cobbs, mournfully; "an' they're

killin' off the deer. Lord be praised for the hogs, says I. After all, I ain't goin' to grunt iz long's I kin shoot wil' hogs. I tell ye, Bud, thar ain't no sport comes a nigh wil'-hog huntin'. Naw, sir."

Cobbs had other tales, of human beings, wilder and more merciless than the brutes. He had lived in Arkansas all through the lawless time after the war. He had been one of the band of determined men that had hunted down the guerrillas.

"What did you do to them?" Cecil asked (after all, the South *was* like the times of chivalry, with all that fighting), "send them to prison?"

Cobbs killed a fly on Zerufa's mane with a single swift flip of the whip-lash. "We jest natchelly stood 'em up ag'in a tree and shot 'em. We hadn't no time to be storin' 'em up, onywhar."

"And only think of it," said Sally, "Dawsey was one of those wicked men!"

This thought reminded her that they were to consult Cobbs about the handkerchief, which she promptly submitted to him.

Cobbs received it as conclusive evidence of Dawsey's guilt.

"We could show it to a jury, you know," Sally claimed.

"And seein's believin'," said Cobbs.

"But," Cecil objected, "wouldn't you have to prove that Dawsey wore the mask?"

This was a blighting thought, but (beginning with Ally) they all recognized its force.

"We have to get more evidence," Sally acknowledged, sorrowfully; and immediately she proposed going into the woods where they had found the handkerchief.

They talked the matter over all the way to the station, and most of the way home.

As they passed Aunt Valley's house, returning, they saw the old woman, out in her cotton-patch, busy stripping the brown twigs. In the doorway of the hut sat a little girl, who hastily swung herself on all-fours back into the shadow and then as hastily swung herself back. And behold, under the sunbonnet, is Larry's face!

"Howdy, Ally?" he calls.

"Howdy, Larry Jane?" shouts Ally back; which Cobbs regards as a master-stroke of humor.

"Didn't I tell you Aunt Valley would know how to keep Larry safe?" says Ally.

"Yes, she's right shrewd," says Sally, "and, Ally, I don't believe she's got nearly so bad rheumatism as she pretends. She was walking as spry

in the patch until she saw us; and then she bent over double, and was as feeble as you please. She puts it on, *I* think, just to get flannels and medicine out of mamma. You see if she doesn't come for some new flannels when mamma gets back from the Rock."

"Yes," Ally takes up the tale, "and whisky, too; she's awful fond of 'lasses and whisky mixed; she says nothing strikes the misery in her breast like that. Some days she pretends to mamma she's got the breast complaint—that's what they call consumption; though nobody ever did have it here."

"Oh, she's schemy," says Cobbs.

It was after nine o'clock when the horses passed the Dawsey place, as mute, desolate, and disheveled-looking, as when Cecil first saw it.

Dawsey was nowhere visible.

CHAPTER VI.

ON THE TRAIL.

Cecil would have been contented to stay quietly at home, that afternoon, and explore the Seytons' old-fashioned library; but Sally and Alan both were so eager to ransack the woods after what Sally always called "clews," that he kept his inclinations to himself. Cobbs and Henri completed the party. Just why Henri was invited Cecil did not perceive, although Sally explained that it was because dogs were so sagacious, and Henri was perfectly splendid about finding things.

"Henri'll be surprised," said Ally; "he'll know we can't be hunting coons by daylight, and he won't know what to think."

Henri contentedly trotted at their heels.

They searched all the vicinity of the place where they had found the mask. Henri ran and barked and scratched among the leaves; but the ground was so littered with dead leaves and herbage, and

so defaced by wandering pigs, that a troop might pass over it and no one be the wiser.

Sally, however, had a theory. "If they came from Aunt Pearl Hotchkiss's place," said she, "or were going there, they would have to ford the creek by Joe Simmons's. May be we can find tracks there; there's a piece of right clayey land on the other side, you know."

"Do you reckon there would be tracks in it?" said Ally; "it's as dry as bone."

"It wasn't, that night. Don't you remember how wet the road was when we went for Cousin Cecil? There would sure be footprints if they went over that way to Uncle Joe's house."

Cobbs thought it worth a trial; Ally, as usual, agreed with Cobbs. Henri already was running ahead, with his nose to the ground, in the direction that they proposed to take.

They were all four on horseback, and they forded the creek quite in the manner that Sally assumed the marauders must have done.

Sure enough, on the other side, there were indistinct marks of hoofs denting the slippery bank.

By the marks, there had been at least four horses, possibly more, since the prints were confused.

"Here's four all together," called Cecil (the seekers had dismounted and were peering at the marks); "they're in soft ground, too."

They were so much stronger prints that they were like molds of a horse's hoof. Cobbs kneeled down, put a piece of paper on them, and marked them off with great nicety, afterward cutting out the paper with his knife. He pronounced them to be the hoofs of a mule, and a lame mule at that, because one print was shallower than the others. "Favored that foot, ye understand," said Cobbs. "I got a mule, Cessil" (you can image how it pleased Cis to have "a common man," like Cobbs, make thus free with his fine English Christian name!)—"I got a mule that's hip-short, an' I know how mules does. That's him I ben ridin'. Well, less look furder, so we sha'n't fare wuss."

A disappointment met them at the onset. The clay bank ascended into the common highway where all the tracks were lost. There was the further chance, too, that the tracks that they had seen might not belong to the marauders, but to peaceful citizens going (on horseback) about their lawful business.

But they went on until they came to the short cut through the woods to Aunt Pearl Hotchkiss's.

Finding the hoof-prints.

There, more tracks were seen; only a few in soft places of the road, and these few nearly obliterated; nevertheless, not to be passed lightly, for Cobbs had fitted his pattern to them, and lo! they were the exact size. Bent on mischief or not, the riders who had crossed the ford had gone on to Aunt Pearl Hotchkiss's.

Aunt Pearl Hotchkiss, when interrogated, declared nobody had been to see her at all. Further interrogated: Well, nobody outen her own fam'ly and looked like dey didn't count; big sister and her five little tricks, and the preacher, an' may be Br'er Moses mought a-come, but she reckoned dat las' week, kase "Br'er Moses, his health ben mighty triflin', he cramped an' cramped, an' de Lawd on'y knowed what he got inside hissef to cramp him dat a way"—so on through the legion of Brother Moses's "miseries" and "hurtin's," until Sally asked if any of her visitors had come on horseback. At first she was sure that no one had; then she was sure that Unk' Enoch Diss (an entirely new arrival into the narrative) did ride a mule—"dat lame mule he taken frum de widder Mead on a debt"; then she could not remember whether Uncle Enoch had actually come to her house, or she had seen him at "preachin'."

"How many lame mules there do seem to be in this country!" Cecil muttered.

Vainly they tried to find out something definite from Aunt Pearl; the more she was questioned the dizzier grew her testimony, and the wilder and more extensive her rambles among her family, and the diseases that had kept her "kin" from her door.

In despair they bade her good-by. Poor Sally was quite depressed because she neither knew a "plumb sho' cure" for "bone erysipelas" and "antedelarious fever" (both of which fell and mysterious diseases were "a-workin' in" Aunt Pearl, for all she looked "so stout and gayly"), nor could she show Aunt Pearl how to crochet a lamp-mat.

"I just don't know anything useful," thought Sally, in much disquietude; "I'll never go around doing good and being blessed by the poor like Flora McIvor, or the Dairyman's Daughter." Sally, you see, read old-fashioned books; Scott and Cooper on week-days and the Dairyman's Daughter on Sundays, because it was in the Sunday-school library.

Ally observed her downcast air, although he never would have guessed the reason; or understood it, had any one told him. He rode alongside and tried to cheer her. He didn't ask her what

was the matter, that wasn't his way; he remarked: "Say, sis, I don't guess I want my chess-board any more; you can have it."

This was Ally's way; he never approached a subject—he always landed on it with a jump; by consequence he sometimes sprawled over it. His bluntness was as successful with Sally as the most adroit sympathy. If she hadn't been on horseback, she would have embraced him; she did give his hand a loving pat, while her eyes flashed and the blood darted up her cheeks.

"Why, Ally Seyton," she cried, "you don't mean it! Why, you said you wouldn't sell it to me for anything I've got!"

"Well, I won't. I give it to you."

"Why?"

"Oh, 'cause. Put back your eyes, sis, and 'tend to business."

Really, Ally's conscience had been prodding him because he had been very sharp with Sally about that chess-board; she had taken it without leave and, unluckily, lost a man. He upbraided her for losing the man, although it was only a pawn; and she had crawled under the lounge and two book-cases, and had run a pin beneath her nail, poking her fingers along the crease between the lounge-

back and seat—which same crease in upholstery is a cruel ambush for pins, the world over.

And he refused to take a pearl-handled penknife with only one blade broken, or Milly Grant's Mission (an almost new book) or a rose-bud decorated cup and saucer marked "For a Good Girl"; he said that he wasn't a good girl.

He told Sally the chess-board was nicer than anything he had on earth, and she had ruined it, and all right for her; then, he marched away from her tears.

This disastrous episode had happened immediately after dinner (while two black boys were chasing the horses around a twenty-acre pasture, saddles in hand, and Cecil admired the circus); owing to it, Sally started, feeling injured and dejected.

Ally's kindness sent her mercurial spirits bounding up to happiness. She was sure she had been altogether to blame in the skirmish, and that Ally was the kindest, most forgiving brother in the world, and—oh, if papa only would do as she wanted, and get *him* the watch at Christmas instead of her!

Cecil had not taken in the little drama; he was ahead with Cobbs, with a vigilant eye out for bare spots in the grass where hoof-prints might show.

The cavalcade rode on to Peats's and to Looney's and to the other houses of the terrified. Nowhere any reasonable clew; some dubious trampling in the "little hurd"* or prairie, in the wood close to Looney's corn-crib, a raw slash in a dogwood-bough, as if some one (but what surety that it was an evil-doer?) had clipped a switch, a broken white-clay pipe in a puddle—absolutely nothing more.

"Reckon we got to give it up an' make tracks for home, missy," Cobbs said, at last. He had buttoned his coat over the clay pipe and sat sidewise in his saddle, gazing in a dejected way at Looney's jagged chimney and squinting windows.

Two or three curs leaped out of the unknown and snarled and stiffened their tails at Henri—at that moment a blameless dog, trotting in an unobtrusive bee-line after his master.

How injudicious of those curs to run after peril! They should have known that the big dog was not afraid. They should have made a note of his powerful shoulders and jaws like a steel trap, and the wicked *litherness* of his whole lank shape. Alas for Watch, Paddy, and Elijah (those doomed dogs' names)! they were canine swashbucklers; because they were three to one, they thought they

* Hood.

could eat Henri up; and *Pouf! Gr-r-r! Gor-r-ru!* they tumbled on him in a bunch.

"Oh, gracious goodness!" screamed Sally, "they'll *kill* Henri." Therewith she was off her horse like a flash, charging on the heap with her riding-whip.

Ally was not so nimble, but he made his best speed to her, bawling: "*Eyes*, sis, *eyes!* aim at their eyes! I'll pull at their tails."

"Lord sakes, children!" Cobbs shouted, jerking Sally away; "git clar! Cayn't ye see Onery's ekal to lickin the hull bilin?—Take Ally off, Cessil, cayn't ye?"

Truly Henri was equal to all three, as Cecil (who held the panting Ally) instantly perceived; with one deadly wriggle, Henri had throttled Ally's captive. He grabbed a large portion of Paddy's left shoulder, then snapped the steel trap on the right fore leg of the howling Elijah.

Round and round the heap spun like a futile pin-wheel, fur and foam flying, the air stabbed by a clamor of barks, sharp and short as fire-crackers. Over the bank into the slash! Plenty of water to quench their fire; but they roll and bark and bite through the puddles! Elijah is underneath; he slinks out, a gory and sodden beast, who speeds

back to his master. Looney himself hurries on the scene of conflict, a strap in one hand, a razor in the other, using bad language.

"I'll break you in two! I'll set de hide on you!" he yells, "pitchin on to my dog, ye ornery pusillanimous tyke, you! Quit you' funnin'! I sho' break you bres'bone wid dis strap!"

"No you won't," says Cobbs.

"I cut you wid a razor!" shrieks Looney. Whether he means Cobbs or the dog, there is no saying; most likely he does not know, being in a genuine negro frenzy, brutal, blind, bloodthirsty.

"Henri! Henri! Henri!"—Sally tries to call the dog.—"Oh, *please*, Looney, don't hurt him! it's *our* dog."

"What's the matter with you, Looney?" demands Ally, sharply: "It's *our* dog."

He speaks in the assured master's tone, the white man's tone, before which the Southern negro has crouched for generations; he doesn't dream of being frightened by Looney's antics. Cecil has his revolver out to flourish in front of Sally; but Cobbs unceremoniously pins the revolver arm to his side.

"Groun's the bes' place to aim them tricks, boy," says Cobbs, and shakes a forefinger at

Looney, instead. "Why, you blamed fool, what are you ra'rin' 'baout? Look at the dogs!"

He may brace himself as he pleases; but his father was a slave, and these are white folks. He wavers, drops his razor hand. He does look at the dogs. What a sight to teach magnanimity! The wretched Paddy—Watch dead, and the craven Elijah saving his own skin—has no chance at all; Henri has gripped him by the throat. He shakes him—and lets him go!

"Thar! That ar's a *dog!*" cried Cobbs, slapping his thighs gleefully.—"You Looney, you' omstreperous, low-down pizen curs pitched onto that noble animile, three at whack, an' look how he lets the least one off! He jes' natchelly won't *condescend* to kill him. Now my advice to you are: you light out ayfter you' dogs; an' keep that 'ar razor er yourn in you bury-drawer for evermore, amen!"

Looney scowled; nevertheless, he turned on his heel and shambled across the frowzy fields into his own yard.

Sally darted after him before they suspected her intention. She reached him, barely able to gasp: "O Looney, I'm sorry 'bout Watch, but he truly did pitch on to Henri. I don't think they're much

hurt—the other dogs, I mean. And if you want to, there's such a cunning little puppy in the stable you can have; looks just like Henri, and he's mighty peart and knowing."

Looney's rage was the thunder-gust of his race; he laughed outright: "Laws, missy, I didn't 'low to be so r'arin' and chargin';* but Mist' Cobbs am so bigetty sometimes, fa'ly gits me outer mysef, till I doesn't know nary. I wudn't hu't a ha'r you' purty haid, nur you' brudder's needer. I jes' ben r'arin'."

"Well, don't you get to r'arin' any more, Looney," advised Sally.

Looney promised volubly. She was glad to leave him in a peaceful frame of mind; she was glad Henri hadn't hurt the dog; very lightly she danced over the rough ground, with the wild rose in her cheeks and her dark hair floating.

"Fo' all the worl'," mused the man, watching the pretty shape, "like 'a heen'† a-sailin', or a angil. I sho' Miss Sally git t' heben w'en she die, she got sich a heap er sense."

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* R'arin' and chargin' (rearing and charging) is an Arkansas expression for rage. The metaphor, it is plain, is borrowed from horses.

† Hen.

The group that she left were not in the same places ; no, they were down in the "slash," huddled about Henri. Sally's heart gave a great throb—O Henri ! was poor Henri hurt ?

Instantly she was reassured, for she heard Cobbs laugh ; surely, Cobbs wouldn't laugh if Henri were much hurt. Ally beckoned to her. He looked excited ; he swung his fist—he swung both fists.

When she came near, Cecil helped her on to a log in order that she might cross without wetting her feet.

"That's right, bud," said Cobbs.—"Now, missy, I'll tell ye whut 'tis we all gapin' at.—Say, young feller, you bes' tuck that ar gun er yourn closter in you' jacket. I warn't a-goin' to fault you afore the nigger, but thar's a blamed big fine ag'in carryin' concealed weapons in the State of Arkansas, an' they're liable t' enforce it, tew."

"O Cobbs"—Sally could not control her anxiety about Henri any longer, having just discovered two piteous, dark, matted spots—"*please*, is Henri hurt bad ?"

"Bless you, naw, missy," said Cobbs ; "them thar's mainly mud. They broke the skin for him in two or three places, but thar ain't nuthin' the matter of him. But it are plumb lucky he had the fight,

fur we done met up with that mule's hoffs ag'in, by gum! Look a thar. Plain's you' nose. I medjured them with the paper, an' it's the same ole cuss."

Sally looked. There were the mule's tracks and other tracks, or, it might be, the same mule's tracks where he had been restless.

The one soft bit of ground was in a hollow, behind a cluster of elbow-brush and tear-blankets, thus securely concealed from view whichever side one took to look for it.

"Coming over to get Henri, I found them," said Cecil; "it's close by where we found the pipe."

"Yes," said Sally, "and Cobbs found something else. Somebody struck matches to light a pipe; there are burnt matches under the tree."

"Thar *was* burnt matches thar," said Cobbs, "but they're in my pocket jest now."

Cobbs had a theory that he expounded on the way home. He said: "Now, gentlemen an' ladies, ye know the sayin', 'Go slow an' ye wunt stub yer toes.' I don't wanter decide haff-cock. But it are my opinion that mule is Mist' Henderson. You uns say, How come you say that, Cobbs? Well, *fustly*, that mule ben lame, an' Mist' Henderson—("Another lame mule?" exclaimed Cecil)—he ain't lame, but he are so schemy he plays off lame ever' time he

feels tuckered aout, an' craves t' git back t' his cotton-seed. That's Mist' Henderson. *Secondly*, that mule stopped unner that ar hackberry tree—know that by his nibblin' the berries; an Mist' Henderson loves hackberries much iz a turkey. Aunt Valley kinder trained them mules t' eat hackberries when she taken 'em, to gentle 'em. *Thirdly*, ain't Mist' Henderson Dawsey's mule, an' ain't it likely Dawsey taken his bes' an' obedientest critter on sich a errant? You bet he wud."

"But, Cobbs," objected Sally, with an anxious face, "Aunt Valley, you know! She saw Dawsey, and he was riding his claybank horse."

"Well, missy, didn't I told ye go slow an' ye won't stub yer toes? Who sayd Dawsey rid Mist' Henderson? I sayd *taken*. Are you uns putting it up Dawsey cavorted raoun by his 'lone? Naw, ma'am. He got his frien's, an' one er the frien's comes up nice an' quiet to the yard an' lopes Mist' Henderson. In *co'se*, he don't come the same way nur go the same way like Dawsey; but they all got thar rendervus, an' they meets."

"I think so, too," said Ally.

Cobbs gave the boy a kindly look. "Laws, but ye do p'intedly favor you' paw, sometimes, Ally," said he; "ye got a turn, when ye talk, mighty much

like him. Well, I ben sayin', yere's this turrible wicked man a-pesterin' us for years; now, we got a show t' send him to the penertenshury, an' I say less do it. Tain't a much bad thing he done, I admit; nobuddy killed up, an' nare plunder stole, nur nare chickens gone, but no matter! He *aimed* to do bad things, if he didn't done 'em—spile cunnel's crap an' skeer up his renters. An' I reckon you know cunnel's fixin' to send a detective from Little Rock to snoop aout the hull meanness."

"A detective?" said Cecil; "O, yes, that's what Cousin Richard meant by his plan. I understand."

Alan and Sally had known before; they simply nodded.

"An' I are savin' all the truck for him when he comes," said Cobbs; "an' to my thinkin' he'll say we uns done a good evenin's work this day."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DETECTIVE.

"He's come!" cried Sally.

Ally and Cecil were sitting on the uneven steps of the store piazza; in the dusky vista behind them, shoulders of pork swinging from huge hooks, gleaming pans, rusty iron pots and kettles, and huge meat-blocks, dimly shaped themselves to one side, and, on the other, the paraphernalia of drugs and groceries were displayed against a background of ready-made clothing, dry-goods and bonnets.

Cecil found endless amusement in "the store," which seemed to him an untidy imitation of the "fairs" and such like shops in cities—places where respectable people only ventured out of curiosity, with the prospect of having their pockets picked.

"Who's come?" said Ally.

It was a week after Larry had been safely

stowed away. To-day was the first time that they had heard from Aunt Valley. True, the wagon had gone to the station for supplies more than once; but the children had not ventured to send any messenger less trusty than Cobbs to Aunt Valley; and Cobbs regarded the regular blacksmith work as much too important to be put aside for Larry.

"And he is right enough," sensible Ally declared when Sally would have criticised; "folks have got to have their wagon-tires mended, for the hauling, and the mill's out of gear somehow, and Cobbs has got to mend it."

But, yesterday, Cobbs had received a letter from the colonel—a letter for himself—which required a great deal of pondering over, behind a pair of huge steel-rimmed spectacles, and finally a consultation with Ally. Then it was announced that Cobbs himself would go in the morning with the wagon to the station.

Sally had been waiting, evidently excited; and Ally himself, under his phlegmatic exterior, showed signs of interest.

"Who's come?" he repeated, impatiently.

He jumped up as he spoke, motioning to Cecil to follow, and drew Sally nearer the river-bank,

quite out of ear-shot, should any of the loungers in the store chance to be listening.

"We are going to tell you," Sally said to Cecil. "Papa said we might, but it's a dead secret to everybody except Cobbs and the overseer. Cobbs went to fetch the *detective*. He's come."

Cecil's composure yielded a little to the demands of the occasion. He had read Gaboreau's novels, and a detective was a wonderful creature to him.

"Let's get closer and hear him talk," Ally proposed; "he's talking now."

"Do you reckon he'll find out 'bout old man Dawsey to-day?"

Ally was not sure; may be by to-morrow, he thought.

"You know all about detectives, don't you, Cousin Cecil?" Sally said, turning her brilliant eyes on Cecil, wistfully.

He was half sorry to dampen their sanguine faith; but he confessed that "Pinkerton's men" usually took longer than a day to probe a mysterious crime.

Then the three went around to the other end of the store where the detective was.

"You mustn't be surprised at his looking so

poor and mean," whispered Sally; "he's in disguise."

Certainly the detective did not look imposing, being a commonplace, fat young man, who was neither any cleaner nor any less ragged than the motley crowd around the store. He spoke with an Arkansas accent; but on the whole he was a rather taciturn fellow, who made his eyes work for his mouth.

Cobbs introduced him to the company generally. "Well, picked up a new helper at the depot, if I didn't get my gears."

The new helper's name, it appeared, was Mitchell.

"That isn't his real name," Sally hastened to inform Cecil in a whisper, cut short by Ally's warning frown.

"He looks like an awful chump," Cecil said to Ally.

"But he's getting them to talk," said Ally, very low.

Not for the first time Cecil was struck by a certain shrewdness in Ally, for whom, in the main, he felt a quiet contempt.

"Look at Aunt Valley," the unconscious Ally continued; "ain't she giving it to Dawsey!"

Aunt Valley had come to the store to trade. She was in her Sunday gown, a remarkable combination of no less than three gowns—sleeves of one, body of another, and skirt of a third—all of gay material, clean and whole. Aunt Valley, having a thrifty soul, saw no reason why she should give up the good part of a frock because the other parts were worn; she simply made as much of a dress out of her material as she could, and pieced out deficiencies with something else, only particular that the addition should be gay: by consequence, her presence commonly reminded one of a second-hand rainbow.

At this moment a dozen colors were flashing in the air, while her arms gyrated over the twentieth repetition of her glimpse of Dawsey.

"And to t'ink," she cried, "how it ben Abram Linkum, dat mule ben de mos' petted on po' Mist' Henderson, dat ben de cause o' me wakin' an' watchin'!"

"But she said before it was Melodeon," said Sally.

"May be she forgot," said Ally; "I thought she said Melodeon."

"She did," said Cecil.

But, at any rate, Abraham Lincoln was getting

all the credit now. She dilated on his intelligence, and from him she passed sadly to the lamented Mr. Henderson's rare gifts. It was an easy transition back to Dawsey again.

The crowd had no good word for him. Indeed, when a tall, grinning black man said that it would be the best thing to run him out of the country, there was a general hum of approval.

"You wudn't objeck, wud ye, Rufe?" some one said, addressing a sullen-looking negro, who, so far, had not said a word.

"I ain't complainin'," he answered, turning on his heel.

"Had he ought to complain?" Mitchell asked, in his sluggish voice.

"Wa'al, ole man Dawsey chiseled him outer eight hundred dollars, pension money, sellin' him a fyarm for sixteen, and promisin' him long time and not givin' it, an' sellin' him up minnit the note come due."

Some one else added to the story. The detective listened to each talker. At the same time he gradually edged his robust person nearer the door.

Any one who stood in the south doorway could see Rufe Baxter, with his hands in his pockets and

his head bent, the apex, as it were, of a dusky pyramid, grouped about the plows on the shore.

Presently he disengaged himself and the pyramid dissolved. Rufe moved toward his ferry-boat (he was the ferryman), casting not a glance behind.

But Aunt Valley watched him untie the scow; watched him row across the river with strong, clean strokes; watched him land, and then watched him walk rapidly into the forest.

All the while she was smiling. When Rufe was out of sight, she mounted her mule and went her way.

"Why, Abraham Lincoln is lame!" said Ally.

"Another!" said Cecil. "I'm going to keep count."

"Then Aunt Valley ought not to ride him," said Sally.

"He isn't exactly lame," Cecil remarked, after a moment's scrutiny; "he has string-halt; it doesn't hurt him to ride him."

Ally looked at his cousin admiringly. "You know oodles about horses, don't you, Cis? Come, let's get closer and hear what they're saying."

The two boys hung about the store and the blacksmith's shop all the morning. The teacher being ill, there was no school, for which release, I

must confess, Cecil was quite as thankful as idle Ally. The truth is, he had encountered so many disreputable-looking little boys and girls, on apparently the most familiar and happy terms with Ally —all of whom, Ally told him, "went to our school" —that he looked forward to school as to a nightmare.

But his politeness never failed him, and I doubt whether Ally suspected in what a tumult of disgust his young guest's soul was; sitting in a narrow boat, next some particularly grimy and unkempt comrade of Ally's, or forced to draw up to a hospitable board (covered with brown oil-cloth) and try to eat strange mixtures of grease and dirt, the very sight of which sent cold chills down his back.

Ally ate like the unfastidious savage he was; but Cis thought often that the horrors of an ocean voyage were much overrated; he preferred them to fried pork.

Yet he was by no means dull. There is a constant ripple of small excitements on a plantation. Every morning, for instance, the mail-rider, who was a boy hardly older than Ally, rode his white Texan pony up to the store, and the letters were collected and names called by the head clerk in the store, assistant postmaster. Colonel Seyton was the

postmaster, and the post-office was neatly built into the far corner of the store, which was not asking much of the store either, since it consisted of nothing more than a writing-desk, with a frame of letter-boxes.

Twice a week, sometimes oftener, Cecil heard from his father—short letters; but how eagerly he read them!

Sally and Alan heard every day, either from Colonel Seyton or their mother. The invalid in Little Rock was better; next week Mrs. Seyton hoped to come home.

"Well," was Ally's ungracious comment, "next to her dying, I reckon her getting well is the best thing can happen."

"We oughtn't to wish anybody dead," said Sally; "it's a great deal nicer for her to get well."

"No it ain't," answered Ally, bluntly, "an' you know it! If she was dead, she couldn't be forever tolling mamma off, could she; or coming here and snooping round and dying when I tried to have ice-cream? No, sir!"

"Well, she ain't always mean. She gave me a doll once," Sally pleaded; "and mamma says it's like being a murderer to wish folks dead."

Ally declined to discuss the moralities. He

proposed, instead, that they should go and ask Cobbs when the wild-hog hunt was coming off.

"Because Cis and I are to go," said Ally.

"O Ally, papa wouldn't let you!"

"He said, himself, last time, I could go to the next hunt."

"But he thought he would be here."

"Pshaw! Cobbs can take me. He knows more about pig-killing than anybody; papa says so himself."

"Cobbs won't take you, not while papa is away," said Sally, firmly. Alan only grinned.

The great hog-hunt, or rather its discussion with Cobbs, and the listening to recitals of gorgeous and blood-curdling perils in former hunts, was another excitement.

Then, almost every day, the wagon went to the railway station. To watch for its return, to open the freight-boxes and express packages—here was at least an hour of delight, every time.

These were every-day diversions. Of a more unusual and vastly more thrilling nature was the negro scare. It was something impressive and important to have a proclamation, from the Governor of the State of Arkansas, tacked up on the door (inside and out) of your store, offering five hundred

dollars reward to any one (it might be you yourself) who should discover the perpetrators of an outrage committed in your own neighborhood. The "renters" and "hands," and the stray farmers trading at the store, used to spell out the notice for themselves; and Mr. Crane, the head clerk, would read the telegrams in the Northern papers sent to Cecil, and the astonishing editorial inferences and eloquence thereon, to a proud and solemn audience, that plainly felt the eyes of the world upon them.

Under such circumstances Cecil could not be dull; but he sometimes was poignantly unhappy. The poor, proud, foolish lad, who only found one companionship precious, missed that all the time. He was homesick for his father.

Sally was his best comforter, because she would tell him stories that her mother had told her, about the time when the two cousins used to play together, like brother and sister. Listening to these simple narratives, Cecil came, by degrees, to understand something that was the puzzle of his whole childhood — why his father kept Cousin Emily's picture in his desk, and was always suggesting gifts for him to give the Seytons; and spoke of Colonel Seyton and his wife as if they were better than any one else in the world; whereas his mother

took pains to inform him that they were very ordinary people, not at all rich or important.

More than once his father had described his years down South with Colonel Seyton immediately after the war; but it was so much more vivid hearing the story on the very spot, with Sally to emphasize every scene by—"There, look across the river; that's where they landed the raft"; or, "Your father used to sit on that lounge and hold his head so, and talk to papa and mamma about his schemes."

All the schemes had been realized, Cis knew; and he knew that his father's old friend was a poor man, according to Northern standards; yet he felt a little thrill of anger over his mother's blunders.

"I believe he is happier than dad," Cis told himself, "and he is of just as much importance in Arkansas as dad is in Chicago. Yes, he is more important, because there is a lot of other millionaires in Chicago; and he can't ride all day on his own land, and have everybody take off his hat to him, like Cousin Richard. Mamma never *can* see anything unless it jumps at the eyes!"

Decidedly, Cecil was not respectful to his mother.

When his black moods fell on him, Cecil wel-

comed any distraction. He flung himself into the detective business to-day with ardor.

There was not much to reward the boy's waiting. Mitchell very soon sauntered over to the smithy, where he spent the entire morning, hammering at wagon-tires.

The smithy stood under a giant "overcup" oak, hardly a stone's-throw from the store. One might see a pile of plows and stalk-cutters at the door any day, waiting their turn at the forge, that glimmered like a great red eye out of the dusk.

A curving road swung past the smithy, by a few cabins, to dip into the cypress-brake, beyond the hill.

The brake always gave Cecil a lonesome, shivery feeling. Indeed, a cypress-brake, in winter, is more than desolate; it has a sinister mystery about it, like the scene of a forgotten horror, with its uncanny growth of knees, and stumps, and blotched hackberry-trunks; and the wind skulking amid the stripped branches; and the black, flat water plane that has no ripple, only haunting shadows of the ruined forest. Strange shapes waver in the water, elusive, monstrous; they are not tree-columns or cypress-knees; they are the awful, unspeakable secrets of the forest, telling themselves in pictures.

At least that is what Sally told Cecil they were

one day when they were very friendly together. Ally wasn't with them. Ally did not think any fanciful things about the brake.

Sometimes the brake fascinated Cecil (who did think fanciful things), sometimes he hated it—to-day, for instance, because he had not received the anticipated letter from his father.

It looked drearier than ever as he passed, and it was a moment before he perceived that there was a reason; the little flutter of human life and color that the gypsy camp had made on its edge, had vanished. The camp-fires were gray ashes; the tents were gone; nothing remained but a squalid wreckage of chicken-feathers and tin cans.

It happened that Mitchell walked homeward with the boys. He was to lodge with Cobbs; and the old black woman, who came over every day to do Cobbs's cooking (as much as he would allow her, that is, for Cobbs had gifts of his own with the kitchen stove, and stern principles), was preparing a "plumb good dinner" in honor of a visit from Ally and Cecil. I believe that Cecil was to taste his first 'possum on this occasion.

Mitchell looked discontentedly at the abandoned camp. He made numerous inquiries regarding the gypsies and their ways.

"Why, you don't suspect them, do you, Mr. Mitchell?" cried Ally. He walked at one elbow of the great man, and Cecil at the other.

"Never can tell," said Mitchell.

"You can talk freely with us, Mr. Mitchell," Cecil observed, with a condescending desire to put the man at his ease. Master Cecil was accustomed to deference, and he did not yet realize that he had left deference behind him at the North. "Colonel Seyton has told us about you."

"Oh, that's all right," said Mitchell. He did not appear to need any putting at his ease.

Ally, who was watching his every motion, from the way he held his hands in his pockets to the way he chewed tobacco, modestly asked if Cobbs had given him the handkerchief and the other things.

Yes, Cobbs had given him them all, and told him about it; but he would like to hear what the boys thought.

"*He* can tell better than me," said Ally, pointing at Cecil; and Cecil, nothing loath, told all that he knew.

The detective's questions were few, and some of them quite inexplicable to the boys. Why should he want to know about Cobbs's disputes with the

darkeys, or Mr. Crane's row with Aunt Pearl Hotchkiss? He made no comments.

"Don't you think Dawsey did it?" Cecil asked.

"Never can tell," said Mitchell.

He certainly didn't tell, whether he could or not; and although they went back part way to the shop, after dinner, not another word did they get from him.

"I reckon he's ciphering it out, don't you?" said Ally.

"He's either very deep or very stupid," said Cecil; "I'm not quite sure which."

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW CECIL MAKES ACQUAINTANCE WITH JUDGE LYNCH.

The boys had been out for a long ride, and were glad to warm themselves by the fire. It was the day after Mitchell's arrival. Cecil was just inquiring of Ally what they should do next, when Sally ran in with pale face and sparkling eyes. She came very close to the boys and cried in an agitated whisper:

"O Ally Seyton, what do you reckon they're aiming to do?"

"What?" said Ally, stolidly.

"They are going to lynch old man Dawsey to-night!"

"Shucks! I don't believe it. Who told you?"

Sally's information came from a dialogue that she had overheard, she being in the "dark closet" where the meat was kept; and the speakers, Aunt Cindy and her nephew, Rufe Baxter, outside on the steps.

Two white men had proposed the lynching. Like Baxter, they had lost their little worldly all, through Dawsey's hard-hearted greed. Baxter, himself, though a merry, good-natured negro, where Dawsey was concerned was in a state of mind ripe for any violence. The negroes of the settlement inclined to panic rather than revenge; but Aunt Valley and Baxter, together, had succeeded in arousing them.

Aunt Cindy was a pacific soul. She discouraged Rufe's riotous schemes.

"Let de Lawd punish dat wicked man, honey," she had said. "Doan you go devilin' wid bad white folkses; you get in a right smart er trouble fust you knows."

"I'll nev' get in no trouble lickin' ole Dawsey," Rufe answered. "We all doesn't aim t' kill him; jes' giv him de bud good, an' warn him t' light out o' dis kentry. Oh, doan ye take on; he ain't got a frien' on earth."

"Waal, but he got a w'ite skin," said Aunt Cindy; "tell ye, nigger, de w'ite folkses won't enjure havin' de culled folkses punish dar wick'-ness. Naw, honey; wait on de Lawd; dat man git his desarvins sho'!"

At this climax of the conversation, Aunt Cindy

must needs get up, and they both moved away; nor could Sally catch a word of Baxter's sullen reply.

"But I'm sure he won't give in, and they will go and whip Dawsey, just as he said," was her conclusion.

Ally laughed at first. "We shall be rid of a great rascal," said he. "What are you looking so queer about, sis?"

"Do you reckon they'll whip him very hard?" Sally inquired.

"Not half as hard as he deserves, I know that."

Sally's face changed; rather timidly she said: "Don't you think it would be just as well to scare him awfully, tell him they were fixing to whip him, and may be swing the switches round and make a noise in the air, like Cobbs when he is driving Net and Jake; and then let him off if he's sorry and will go away and never come back?"

Ally's blue eyes opened wider; his stolid face assumed by degrees an expression of indignant scorn, before which poor Sally quailed.

"I do believe," said Ally, slowly, "you're *sorry* for old Dawsey."

"No, I ain't," protested Sally; "but it must hurt so to be whipped."

"He ought to be hurt," said Ally, firmly; "it's only justice." Ally had reached the age when a boy is a great stickler for justice. "Why, I've heard you wish him a thrashing many a time, yourself, just like he gave Mr. Henderson."

"I know," Sally admitted, meekly, "but then I was mad at him. It's so hard to hurt people when you ain't mad at them."

"When I'm mad, I stay mad," said Ally with much loftiness, "but that's just like girls, get mad at nothing and get over it for nothing."

Sally, crushed not only by the consciousness of her individual weak-mindedness, but by this stinging estimate of her weak-minded sex, looked ready to cry; and (doubtless again like a girl) took refuge in an entirely different reason. "Anyhow, papa wouldn't like it while he was away; and to have the darkeys lynch a white man! It would mad the white folks."

Ally bit his lip. He flung the stick in his hand at the blaze with an angry motion, muttering, "Well, why couldn't you say that in the first place?"

Cecil wondered what the boy was thinking about as he thrust his hands into his pockets, and frowned out of the window at the river. Sally did not venture to interrupt.

"Yet she is four times as bright as he," Cecil said to himself; "what does she see in him? If I had a sister, I'd treat her politely. He is a young cub."

Really, Ally was no franker than brothers in general, who are not apt to use a harmful flattery to their sisters, but rather to help them amend their faults by faithfully and carefully pointing them out; and he was in general very kind to Sally; sometimes he almost forgot that she was a girl, he liked her so much. I dare say Cecil's sister would have been taken to task quite as much as Ally's. Finally, the boy looked up.

"It can't go on, for a fact, sissy," said he, with a deep sigh. "I'm sure Cobbs will say that it would make a racket. We've got to stop it."

"I hate to tell on them," said Sally.

Cecil smiled over another inconsistency; but here brother and sister were in full accord.

"No, we can't tell on them, to hurt them," said Ally.

Cecil suggested consulting with the detective, having him warn Dawsey.

"Then, you see, Dawsey would feel friendly toward Mitchell and wouldn't suspect him," said the small man of the world, who had read detective novels.

Sally's lip quivered with an impulsive speech, promptly suppressed; but Ally spoke out bluntly: "I don't just like fooling even a mean man like Dawsey—pretending to be friends, all the while you're fixing to do him a meanness."

Cecil was too polite to smile or to shrug his shoulders; besides, his father disliked the French trick, and he was trying to unlearn it; instead, he said gravely that spies were not pleasant, but they were a necessary evil. How did they expect to catch Dawsey, anyhow?

"Oh, I reckon we got to do it," said Ally.

"I think you were mighty bright to think of Mr. Mitchell, Cousin Cecil," said Sally; "all I could think of was to write Dawsey a note telling him to keep away to-night. And that wouldn't have done much good, I reckon."

"Not a bit," said Ally.

"I know what you thought of, Ally," said Cecil.

"What?"

"Talk it over with Cobbs."

Ally grinned, as usual. "Cobbs knows a heap," said he, cheerfully. "That was just what I was thinking."

Cobbs was in the smithy shoeing a horse, and it needed very little management on Sally's part to

entice him out. The three children walked along the river-bank with him. His first emotion over the news was amusement.

"Laws, there hain't been a lynchin' in these yere pyarts for twenty year; and to think er the darkeys gettin' up one now!"

But he grew serious directly, for he appreciated the unwisdom of of negroes lynching white people.

"An' I never did see no good in lynchin', noways," he moralized, "though I mus' say, if thar's a critter livin' desarves a dose, it's Mat Dawsey! But lynchin's tew much like marryin', t' my mind—ye ain't sartin till it's tew late!—Well, Ally, reckon you bes' run tell Mist' Mitchell suthin's outer j'int with one of them thar stalk-cutters, an' I wished he'd sa'nter over an' look at it with me."

Presently, the children could see Mitchell and Cobbs bending over the stalk-cutters; then, in a little while Mitchell walked away, to mount a horse and ride down the road leading to the station—or to Dawsey's. He rode very fast.

CHAPTER IX.

NORTH AND SOUTH.

The living-room of the Seytons was a square-cornered room on the first story, fronting the river; so large that, according to the Seyton tradition, the Seyton babies used to get lost in it.

It was a cheerful room, because the south sun had a chance, with the long windows on the right side, in spite of the veranda shadows in front; and it was a pretty room, because the cheap furnishings were new and harmonious, and the shabby furnishings were old enough to be interesting.

Cecil approved of the soft terra-cotta hangings that threw out so well the plaster bas-reliefs and the photographs of great pictures, and helped the tarnished gilt frames of the old portraits. He liked the colors of the curtains, he liked the ingrain rug, and the painted floor. All the furniture was older than the war, except the piano and the gum-wood book-cases, masterpieces of Cobbs; and some of

the quaintly carved tables, the two spindle-legged, damask-seated chairs, and the rose-wood spinet with yellow ivory keys, had belonged to the generation of the brilliant dame in powder and brocade on the east wall, who had danced with Washington.

More ancient, even, embellished likewise by pathetic associations, as well as most beautiful marqueterie, was Mrs. Seyton's writing-desk. It had come over with the first Seyton, and his young daughter (what a pity there was no portrait of her!) on this desk had written all her love-letters to her betrothed in England, who was to be lost at sea, coming over to marry her. She only mourned him two months, since (according to an old, old letter, still preserved in that very desk) "she fell into a wasting fever with grieving, whereof she died."

But the most intimate affections of the Seytons clustered about the lounge. Alan and Sally had gamboled on it as babies, and coasted down its sleek leather-covered arms as children, and reclined on it covered with the afghan whenever they were ill enough for cossetings, but not ill enough for bed and doses. Dainties, and nice drinks, and oranges, were privileges of the lounge. Mamma always read to the lounge, and papa would tell stories or play

cards and chess. And of what consequence on earth was it that two of the springs were broken?

On this lounge sat Ally Seyton, the night of the lynching, tempting every other weakling spring to break, so violently did he bounce up and down. Ally was in a fume.

"It's just awful to be children!" groaned he. He varied the bounces by a furious kick. "Think of it," he cried, vehemently; "there they've all gone to the lynching, every nigger on the place, and *we've* got to stay at home! I never saw a man ridden on a rail. I couldn't go to the circus either, 'cause I was sick. And now I've got to miss this!"

"I suppose Cobbs has gone," said Ally's only listener, Cecil. Sally was in the kitchen making a great mess with molasses candy, to console the boys.

"Cobbs and Crane and half a dozen white men. So in case Mitchell can't persuade Dawsey to light out, they can stop the fun. Cobbs said it wouldn't do for me to go! Like to know why not; now papa's away I'm the master of the plantation, and I had ought to go to keep the peace. Cobbs is almost as fussy as Sally. What do you think? He won't let us go on the hog-hunt to-morrow!"

He touched Cecil now, for he was eager for the hunt.

"I call that mean of Cobbs," cried Cecil.

"Oh, no, it ain't," said Ally, loyal to Cobbs in spite of his pique; "it's only he's afraid something will happen when papa's away. But papa promised me to go next time. I tell you, Cis—" He stopped. Then, he dropped his voice. "What do you say to going, anyhow?"

"How can you?"

"Oh, easy 'nough. You see they're going on the road's far's the big bayou and strike into the woods. They'll be eight on horseback and a wagon and mules, and we can follow the wagon-tracks; they will make a plain trail. You see Cobbs won't mind after we once get there, and *he* didn't let us; and papa won't mind at all, when he gets home, 'cause it will be all over, then, anyhow; and he told me I could go next time, you know. I don't reckon anybody will mind 'cept Sally, and if she don't know we're gone she won't mind, either."

Cecil wanted to go to the hunt. He was accustomed to gratify his wishes without thinking very much of other people; indeed, I am afraid Cecil, for all his politeness, was in a fair way to become a selfish fellow. He found Ally's reasoning very plausible.

Ally had more conscience to stifle, in the mat-

ter; but to go to this very hunt had been his ardent desire for a year past, and the temptation was too strong.

"Sally's only a girl, anyhow," so he combated his inward protest; "she's always afraid something will go wrong when mamma's away. I think she'd like to sit up nights to see the house doesn't take fire. We won't let on anything to her; she can't expect to go everywhere I do. She wouldn't be any use in a hog-hunt; 'sides, she'd say it was wrong to go. We'll both go off to-morrow right after breakfast, and we'll leave word with Vance we won't be back to dinner, and she'll think we've gone to see Larry, so she won't worry."

Cis acquiesced, and Ally developed his plans.

"It's a shame Larry's hiding, or else he could go, too. He never does have any fun. I say, though, may be he'll see the lynching. Like's not Aunt Valley will take him." Ally drew a deep sigh. "Like's not by this time they've got to the house and are hollering for him to come out. Laws, how I wish I could see it! I never did see a lynching. Cobbs has seen three, and he saw a man hanged once."

"That could hardly be a pleasant sight," said Cecil, dryly.

"Oh, he was a bad man," Ally said, easily. "It was all right, but I don't guess Cobbs liked it much, either, 'cause he said he'd had a heap more fun at his sister's wedding. Hullo! here's sis, with a power of candy."

Naturally, the subject was changed.

In the morning Cecil feared lest Ally should not hold to his purpose, but a series of winks and grins during breakfast, when innocent Sally was condoling with the boys, because they must miss the hog-hunt, reassured him.

"She don't suspect nothing," said Ally; "I sorter hate not to tell her, after all, but, as Cobbs says, 'what the mind don't know the heart can't grieve.' Come on, let's see them off!"

The little procession was just trotting down into the bottom; the boys were barely in time to see the last of the riders disappear behind the hill.

"That's Mr. Cobbs on the lame mule, ain't it? Say, that mule can outjump any hoss on the place," remarked a drawling voice at Cis's elbow; and the man called Mitchell sat down beside the two boys.

Both of them turned on him eyes full of interest.

"O Mr. Mitchell," cried Ally, eagerly, yet trying to be cautious, "did you hear anything of a

lot of folks going to lynch old man Dawsey, last night?"

Mitchell whistled. "Well, now, even the kids have got on to it! Yes, there been a considerable of a crowd round there, last night. I rode up myself, hearing there was likely to be a row. But some way the old man wasn't at home; and Mr. Cobbs he quieted them down all right. Some folks said the old man got warning, some way. Anyway, he'd lit a shuck, and there wasn't a soul about."

"Then they didn't do anything?" said Ally, his mind divided between relief and a certain disappointment. "Of course, I didn't want them to do anything," he added, quickly.

"Well, no, nothin' was did; looked like there wasn't nothin' to do. Some way he'd cleared out all his stock. Did hear he'd sold some of it mighty cheap to Mr. Cobbs and that mule he had they were sayin' had run off. Rufe was for burnin' down the house, but Mr. Cobbs dissuaded him. Cayn't *he* talk? I don't guess any other man could have quieted those darkeys down like he done. And yet they say he's down on niggers, too; don't like to have 'em round."

"That's a lie," said Ally, calmly.

"Why, I understood he's been having trouble

with some of the niggers—Looney Hotchkiss and some others."

"That was only 'cause they were so trifling and let their pigs into his garden."

"Oh, that was the it of it, was it?" said Mitchell, with the air of one convinced. "Well, he's a mighty nice man, to be sure, Mr. Cobbs is, and a right good rider. Kinder funny he likes that mule better than a horse, and it lame, too!"

"It can tire out any horse on the plantation, for all it's hip-short," said Ally, "and it's terrible fast, too."

"Shucks! He's fast, you say! Reckon you all don't let him stay in the bottom. Keep him up in the stable? Cobbs would hate terribly to have anything happen to him, I judge."

"Well, I should say so," Ally agreed, warmly. "Cobbs was out all night, hunting him once, when he broke loose from the barn and ran off."

"You go, too?" said Mitchell, with flattering interest. He seemed to have become talkative.

"He didn't know anything about it till the next day. He just naturally jumped over the fence and lit out—"

"Not that big picket-fence! Well, I couldn't believe that unless it ben seen."

"Cobbs saw it himself; he was there."

"Anybody else?"

Ally resented the implication of the question. He answered hotly: "Cobbs's word is as good's a dozen! *He* saw it."

"Oh, I ain't aiming to impugn Mr. Cobbs's word," Mitchell hastened to say. "I was just asking, that's all. Does the mule do such tricks much?" He was now addressing Cecil.

"I don't know," Cecil answered. "I never heard of any of them, before. He must have done his high jumping before I came."

"It was the night before you came," said Ally. Then he laughed. "All sorts of things happened that night—ku-kluxes, and everything."

"To be sure," said Mitchell; "but I cayn't get over that big jump. That fence must be rising of six feet. He's a mighty nimble mule."

"He ain't so nimble as Mr. Henderson, Aunt Valley's mule," said Ally. "He's Mr. Henderson's brother."

"Kinder queer name for a mule—'Mr. Henderson.'"

"They call him that 'cause he's so sharp—'smart's a man,' papa said; and so he named him Mr. Henderson; his name was Rube Henderson, to

start with. Why, he's the schemiest fellow. Every place he ever goes to and stops he knows, and, you take him by that place again, he'll stop."

"Bad beast to ride if you're doing a meanness," said Mitchell.

Ally laughed, but Cecil was struck by a new idea that made him grave and silent, and rather relieved when Mitchell was called away to shoe somebody's horse. Then his new idea was given to Ally. "Ally, that fellow was just pumping us."

"Why would he want to pump us?"

"I don't know, but I am sure he was."

Such an answer from illogical Sally would have met a prompt demand for a reason; but Cecil, who lived North, and had crossed the ocean, and knew how to do examples in interest in arithmetic, was quite a different person.

"Come to think of it, he *was* kinder insisting with those questions of his," said Ally, musingly.

"Could he suspect Cobbs, by chance?"

Ally's stolid blue eyes kindled; his light eyebrows met; he exploded at once. "Suspect Cobbs! Well, he must be a fool!"

"Oh, I don't say he does, but he might. Detectives," added Cis, out of the wisdom derived from

Gaboriau's novels—"detectives always suspect the least likely persons."

"What do they do that for?"

"Because nobody else does, don't you know? Then they have all the glory."

"But if they didn't do it?"

"That doesn't matter; they suspect every one else, too."

"Well, I don't think much of detectives, if they are that kind of fellows," said Ally. "Cobbs, indeed! Why, if he had any sense, he'd know Cobbs wouldn't have done it. I wish Sally hadn't given him that handkerchief."

Cecil privately wondered if the detective might not have made a shrewd guess. "Suspect the least likely man," he quoted to himself. To be sure, there was no visible motive, except spite against the negroes with whom he had quarreled, for Cobbs acting so, but there might be other motives underground.

Ally continued the subject: "I should think a detective, a fellow in the business of finding out folks, would know Cobbs was not the right kind of a man to do such a meanness. When Cobbs is mad with anybody, he up and tells him and has it out with him point blank. *Him* romancing round

darkey houses at night, and firing guns at them—that detective is a plumb idiot!"

Cecil laughed; he felt no inclination to defend Mitchell.

"I'll tell Cobbs, the next time I see him, that's what I will," vowed Ally.

"Better not."

"Why not?"

Cecil said, evasively, that it might prejudice Cobbs against Mitchell. Perhaps he wouldn't help him so heartily.

It was a lame argument that Ally interrupted, hotly. "That's all you know about Cobbs, then. You're not much better than Mitchell. Do you reckon Cobbs would stop helping papa out of spite of Mitchell? If Mitchell was his worst enemy, and papa had left Mitchell in his charge, Cobbs would help him. That's the kind of fellow Cobbs is."

Cecil recoiled from this fire; he hated quarrels and disputes; they were vulgar, he thought, from his height of personal dignity. To get in such a way over a servant like Cobbs, too! "The hot-headed cub," he said, contemptuously—not out loud, but to Cecil Raimund—"fancy *me* wanting to fight somebody who had insulted Martin, or the coachman, or one of the grooms!" He shrugged his shoulders.

"You seem very fond of Cobbs," said he, coldly.

Instantly he wished that he had not spoken. Ally's round, freckled face grew red to the eyes; his features quivered; but it was not the anger in them that struck Cis like a blow—it was the look of dumb, bewildered mortification and pain.

"W-what do you think about Cobbs, then?" Ally began, then all at once turned his back on Cecil. "You went hunting with him, too," came in a kind of a sob from the averted figure. Ally was choking and clinching his fists. "And he killed an otter, and was drying its skin for you. He said you were a pretty nice boy—"

Cecil laughed. He meant no harm by the laugh; only Cobbs's compliment sounded so limited, and in Ally's doleful voice so funny; and the very fact that the words before had touched him made the laugh come more easily. Yet it was in his heart to clap Ally on the shoulder and say: "Never mind, Ally, I didn't mean anything. I think Cobbs is a mighty nice man, as you call it." Indeed, his hand was lifted, and "Never" shaped itself on his lips; but it was not spoken, for, quick as thought, Ally wheeled and struck Cecil a stinging blow in the face.

Cecil lifted his fists.

Ally's arms dropped at his sides. He made no effort to strike another blow. His face flushed a darker, more painful red.

"I had no right to do that," he said, in a suffocated kind of voice, "not when you were visiting me. You can strike me, if you like; I won't hit back."

"I don't want to strike you," said Cecil, scornfully. "I don't want to ever have anything more to do with you." He turned on his heel and was walking away.

"What are you going to do?" said Ally.

"I am going to get a horse and ride to the station," said Cecil.

"No, don't. What good is that going to do?" Ally called, half sullenly still. "I begged your pardon; what more can any gentleman do?" cried the Southern lad. "It will make my father feel awful bad—and yours, too. You hadn't *ought* to go, Cis!"

The last shot went home. Through all Cecil's tumult of shock, disgust, indignant fury, a vision of his father's look pierced; again he heard the dear familiar voice saying: "Cis, you are a gentleman." It would hurt dad. Dad wouldn't scold him, but he would be awfully cut up, which was worse.

Cecil turned.

"You can strike me if you like; I won't hit back."

Seizing this sign of wavering, Ally continued eagerly: "Of course, you're mad. That's all right. And, if you want to fight me, I'll go off down in the bottom with you and fight it out. And then, if we're banged up much," said Ally, in his practical fashion, elaborating the idea which, I suspect, had a secret charm for him, "we can go off on the hunt, and everybody'll lay it to that, and we won't need to say a word; most likely, we'll get banged up some more, anyhow, running into branches and thorn-trees—"

"I don't want to fight you," Cecil struck in, with his loftiest dignity. "I take boys of my own size when I want to fight. Do you suppose I can't thrash you?"

Ally looked at him critically. "You needn't stop for that," said he. "I ain't so tall, but I'm mighty stout, and I got a better wind than you. *I* call it 'bout even. But, if you won't fight, I'll let you hit me hard's you can, spang in my face. Only just once, 'cause I only hit you once. Say, will you stay then?"

"That's nonsense," said Cecil; "if I touched you at all, I'd give you a good thrashing. But your father saved my father's life, and I'm not going to pound you while I'm visiting him."

Ally's stolid face worked. "Well, I did say I was sorry."

"That's quite enough," said Cecil, shortly. "Don't let's say anything more about it. Isn't it about time for our horses to come?"

"There's Vance bringing them now," said Ally, in a very subdued tone.

Vance's grin, in fact, was bobbing up and down on Ally's own black pony, while he led the horse that Cecil commonly rode.

When the lads were about to mount, Ally said, "You'd better ride Nig" (the black); "he's a heap the best jumper."

Cecil declined briefly. He preferred Rasmus.

"Aren't you going to leave some word with your sister?" said he, as they settled themselves in the saddles and gathered up the reins.

"Inconsiderate cub!" he thought. He liked to call Ally a cub in his thoughts; it made him feel the more superior; cub was an expression that nobody could apply to polite, clever, perfectly dressed Cecil.

"I plumb forgot," muttered Ally.—"Say, Vance, tell Miss Sally we won't be back to dinner."

The boys galloped away, while Vance soliloquized: "Laws, ain't it fine t' be takin' you' pleasure

dat away an' not habin' go back an' chu'n? I does hate dat chu'n wussern de debbil!"

But I am sure no one that saw the two riders' faces would have guessed that they were going on an excursion of pleasure.

CHAPTER X.

THE HOG-HUNT.

The boys rode into the forest at a gentle pace. In December there come days to Arkansas when the sun seems trying to cheat the earth into the delusion that winter is a sham, and spring already come. Then the undiscourageable grass of the bottom-lands puts forth its tiny shoots and greens all the plain. The willow-twigs have a pink haze, as of rising sap and spring-time; and the clumps of mistletoe scattered through leafless tree-tops, the brilliant gloss of holly-leaves here and there, and the still beautiful verdure of the live-oaks, relieve the dreariness of that somber woodland of cypress and gum.

Such a day shed its gracious warmth everywhere as Cecil and Ally rode along.

If there were no flowers, there were gorgeous dogwood-leaves still clinging to slender saplings, and blood-red swamp-hackberries and dogwood-berries speckling their network of purple twigs.

Little did either of the boys notice the beauty about them.

Hot and angry, or coldly angry, they trotted over the soft ground where the cypress-needles muffled their horses' footfalls.

Ally, in spite of his bluster, was more hurt than angry. Cecil felt that he came off best in the encounter; yet he was conscious of an uncomfortable suspicion that he was more to blame than the violent Ally.

After all, those favorite knights of his never deserted their faithful retainers. Cobbs had been Colonel Seyton's orderly in the war. It was unjust to compare Cobbs to that fat, selfish Martin, the butler, who took commissions from the butcher and grocer, and cheated his master in half a dozen ways. The Raimund servants served for money. "If they didn't get high wages they wouldn't stand mamma's nonsense," thought Cecil, disrespectfully. He knew that his father had men in his employment who served, as Cobbs did, for love. May be Ally was not so wrong about Cobbs. I am not saying that the otter-skin had not some weight with Cis.

But, of course, he was not going to make any advances to Ally. Ally on his part did not know

what to say. Still, he was sure that it was his duty as host to do something in reparation for his fit of passion.

"May be you'd like to know the best way to kill a pig," said he, holding out a verbal flag of truce.

"I brought my revolver," answered Cecil, not relaxing his dignity.

"Well, you *can* shoot 'em with revolvers," Ally continued, although he flushed, "but they generally take guns. They shoot from horseback. It's dangerous to shoot on foot; once, C—— a man, was shooting hogs, and his gun was empty, and he'd shot a whaling big fellow, and Henri—our dog Henri, you know—jumped on him, and there was a terrible wrestle—rolling over and over, every thing all bloody. C—— the man, jumped off his horse. The other man—Mr. Crane, the clerk at the store, that was—says: 'Don't you jump off; the critter's dangerous!' 'Tell you that's Ally's dog,' says he, and jumped, and went at the hog with his knife, and killed him, too! But he got a rip in the arm that laid him up for a month, and Henri was nearly 'bout killed."

"Who was the man?" said Cecil.

"Cobbs," said Ally.

A dead silence. Cecil made no comment on Cobbs's bravery.

They rode as far as the bayou, then turned into the forest.

Now and then Ally would make some remark about the hunt; occasionally Cecil would ask a question; the greatest civility was maintained, and nothing could be more irksome than the situation.

With a deep sigh of relief Ally heard the far-off baying of the hounds and the echoing horns. They were in the wake of the chase.

Instantly everything else was forgotten.

"They're coming this way," cried Ally, excitedly, "Hi! look out! Here they are!"

With a rush and a clamor the hounds burst through the trees. After them came the horsemen. The dogs bayed! The men shouted! The horns rang! The horses' eyeballs glowed, their nostrils dilated; they were wild as their riders.

So the chase swept by; and the boys galloped in the rear.

"Give your horse his head!" Ally shouted; "he knows the way better than you do. Come on."

A forest fire had cleared a wide space before them, in which fallen trees, charred logs, and pronged roots made an uncanny-looking litter.

Yet over this dangerous ground dogs and horsemen galloped at full speed, leaping, dodging, stumbling, but never halting.

The hounds escaped out of view, but the horsemen rushed on furiously, horses as eager as men.

Something contagious in this frenzy of sound and motion fired the boys' blood. They dashed after the hunters. Beyond the burned clearing was the tall cane, high, high above a rider's head.

The hounds had plunged in after the pigs.

The boys in the rear heard a great medley of yells, barks, and gunshots.

"They've rallied!" Ally yelled. "Hurrah! Come on—quick, Cis!"

Where was the coldness between them? Quite swept away by the ardor of the chase.

"Lower down the logs are smaller," said Ally, pointing. There was a huge log fallen across the way. A few of the hunters had cleared it; most of them had ridden to the right to obtain an easier jump.

"It's low enough for me, here," said Cecil, putting his horse at the log.

"Me, too," said Ally, carelessly. Nig went over the log like a bird, but the heels of Cecil's horse clattered. Recklessly they rode on. The cane was

above them, arched on either side. The riders had beaten a path through. They raced over the trampled waves. Ahead of them, the hunters sat on their horses, quieting them. The air was dense with smoke.

Cis knew what a rally was. He had heard Cobbs describe how the hunted hogs will run for their lives at first, but, overtaken, make a desperate stand, fighting the dogs, charging on the horses, and never flee again, but fight until the last hog lies dead.

Half the hogs lay on the trampled ground; the others were tossing the dogs from them on their cimeter-like tusks. The dogs, bleeding, but full of fight, would dash back into the fray again and courageously hang on to the hogs' ears.

Cis saw Henri's white tuft dancing in the thick of the *mêlée* while he snapped and bit, and, retreating nimbly, worrying the hogs more than any dog in the pack.

One huge boar, frightfully wounded, charged on the guns. He came straight toward the two boys. His horrible black head was spiked with two gleaming white tusks, his eyes were coals of fire. Cecil felt a single furious bound of his heart as he aimed his revolver. Think of the revolver playing him

false and missing fire! It was too much for Rasmus; he lost all confidence in his rider, snorted, swerved, and wheeled sharply round. Cecil was off his guard, intent on the boar; he was not thinking of his seat; in another second, he found himself frantically wrenching and kicking at a trumpet-vine that gripped his leg in a vise. And close—closer, that horror of savage death!

On his knees in the tangle he felt blindly for his knife. He never could get it out and open it in time. O poor dad!

He heard the clash of the creature's teeth; he felt, rather than saw, the hot, foul jaws, the blood, the wicked eyes—something spattered on his cheek, turning him deadly sick and faint!

Then—it was Henri's bark! Henri was hanging on the boar's ear. "Hold him, brave dog!—Ally, take care; don't shoot the dog!"

The respite had given Cis his nerve again; in spite of the vine-trap, by flinging himself full length, he recovered his revolver. But, before he could aim, two reports rang out at once. The boar tumbled over, shot so truly that he never quivered. They found two bullets in his brain that night.

"I shot the minute I could get a clear aim, Cis!" cried Ally, jumping off his horse to run up

to his cousin. "You see you were spang in the road!"

"Look a-here, boys," said another voice, a voice that they both knew, as Cobbs lowered his empty gun, "this ain't playin' fair.—Ally, I didn't reckon you'd do me such a meanness as to be comin' here when you' pa ben gone.—Say, go ahead with your firing over yonder, an' kill them three that's left!"

Cobbs's attention was only distracted a moment. The three remaining hogs were shot. Nothing was left to do, now, except to haul the dead beasts to the camp; which was promptly done by attaching a chain to each pig, and so pulling it through the brake to the place where the wagon waited.

The dogs were none of them seriously hurt, so Cobbs was free to come back to the boys.

Cecil, with Ally's aid, had freed himself from the vines and recaptured his horse. Cobbs found him back in his saddle, none the worse for his fall. He was an amusing spectacle, to be sure, with mud and scratches, but Cobbs said that what wouldn't wash off would heal up, and it was a world's wonder he didn't get a rip or two before Ally could shoot; reckoned he would, too, if Onery hadn't chipped in. He never saw such boys! Well, they got to go home now, that was one sure thing. Whether he

would have sent them home (he always said that he should) was not to be decided then, for just as he began—"Now, Ally ye know I jest natchelly hate t' make ye feel bad, but—" Yelp! went the dogs, the horns bellowed, and every man not busy with the dead hogs, was off after the new game!

Perhaps Cobbs felt that it was asking too much of human nature to tell the boys to forego this run. At any rate, all he said was, "Keep close to me, boys!"

Often, to this day, Cecil feels his pulse quickening as that wild rush enacts itself over again in his brain. The weird Southern forest is all about him. Pawpaw-saplings whip his face as his horse's chest beats them down. Leafless vines swing out their lassoes above his head. He is stung by the thorn-tree branches, but what does he care? What would any boy, that, if he live, will be a man, care for bruises and stings, when a brave horse is under him and the prey ahead?

Cecil didn't think of danger; he thought of nothing but to show Cobbs—Cobbs, whom he had despised a few hours ago — that he could ride straight. He was eager, like a young soldier fighting under his general's eye. Nevertheless, somehow (can it be that Cobbs picked his way too

carefully?), they came up at the end of the firing—barely in time to see the last pig drop.

"Thar, now, boys," Cobbs remarked, "ye done seen a sight er fun, an' ye bes' be gittin' home. I'll send somebody to put ye on the wagon-track to the road, an' if ye go now ye'll be back afore sundaown. So come 'long by to the camp an' git a bite; an' then, Ally, ye p'intedly *must* be startin'."

Ally made no objection. He was unusually serious, and more stolid than ever, now the excitement was over. Back they went, therefore, to the camp.

The title seemed to Cecil (who stared around vainly for tents) a large name for nothing more than a wagon, with a white top, and a fire built against a log.

Cobbs himself acted as cook. He very soon had a panful of pork tenderloin hissing on the coals, and some sweet-potatoes buried in the ashes. Then he deftly mixed what he was pleased to term "some biscuits," with flour, butter, baking-powder, and water, enumerating all the ingredients for Cecil's benefit. He turned the dough into another frying-pan, raked out more coals on which he placed it, and covered it with a panful of coals.

"Jest's good oven as ye want," Cobbs said, with twinkling eyes.

"You can cook anything, can't you, Cobbs?" said Ally, admiringly.

"Wa'al, I kin make a stagger at rough cookin', an' I do sometimes try egg custards," said Cobbs, modestly; "onyhow, my ole maw learned me to cook clean, an' I used to cook in the army. Now, what do you boys crave for sop? We got canned peaches, an' prunes, an' lasses; the prunes is fust class; an' we got cheese an' good butter; but ye'll have to do without milk in you' coffee."

"I'm hungry enough to eat anything," said Cecil, who then took the opportunity to make his acknowledgments to Cobbs for his (Cobbs's) timely dispatch of the boar.

"Oh, nev' you mind baout that ar," Cobbs deprecated, sawing the air with his hand as if to cut off Cecil's thanks; "no tellin' if 'twar my shot or Ally's done it. Onery's the one made the best out at holpin' ye, *I* say. Kinder shame to name that smart dog Onery, if *'tis* French lingo fur Henry. Well, it are all afore ye; fall tew, boys!"

Even Cecil was satisfied by Cobbs's military cleanliness. He enjoyed the rude meal, seasoned with backwoods jokes and hunting tales. Cobbs had a good deal to say of a certain brother-in-law of his, who had been a mighty hunter—a wag also,

that "cud 'most make ye die laffin' way he'd cyarry on; looked like, the more dangerouser things was, the more he'd be jokin' and laffin'." One story of his prowess recalled another, and his feats went round the board. The last story-teller sighed in a dolorous way: "Dear, dear, dear, ain't it tew bad! He ben a mighty nice man." Everybody assented. Now, there had been nothing in the story of a dismal cast; in fact, it was a joke. Cecil couldn't understand this commiseration.

"Is he dead?" he ventured to ask.

"Naw, sir," answered the story-teller, solemnly, with a melancholy widening of the mouth not to be called a smile; "he are gone to Texas."

It was as if he had said that he had gone to prison. The other men looked sympathetically at Cobbs. Yet Cis had heard these very men praise Texas.

One old hunter took up the conversation: "I jest did hate it turrible when I heerd he ben gone. I never cud git satisfied baout that thing. Did look *tew* mean. His wife ben a mighty nice lady, Cobbs. Turrible hard on her, I expect."

"I war more sorrier fur maw than fur sis," Cobbs said; "she taken it *hard*. Says I: 'Maw, if ye feel to go with sis, I ain't a word to say; but ye

know ye got a room, an' a home, an' the bossin' of things always, a-waitin' fur ye at Arundel, long's I live.' Did mortify me mightily to have her go; but she sayd sis got a heap to enjure, an' she felt she'd orter holp. So she went. Well, no use makin' a song er it.—Time fur you boys to be fixin' to go; so

'Fill up my cup an' fill up my can,
Saddle my horses an' call off my men,'

like the cunnel sings. Here ye be, boys! All ready! Tell the folks we'll be 'long to-morrow."

Rather ruefully the boys mounted their horses. One of the hunters rode with them as far as the wagon-trail; thence, the way was plain. It was plain, but it was not tempting; the boys had had just enough hunting to be distracted by a feverish hunger for more.

Ally's loyalty to Cobbs kept his grumbling behind his lips; but, at every blast of the horn in the distance, a deep, irrepressible sigh broke from him.

"I wish they'd quit blowing that confounded thing!" he cried at last; "I hate the sound of it when we're not after it."

Cecil simply remarked that the sound grew nearer.

Ally halted. Yes, the sound certainly did grow

louder and clearer, penetrated now by the shrill yelps of the hounds. The Southern boy's eyes kindled; a glow crept into his cheek.

"I just *know* they're only a bit to the right, over yonder," he muttered. "Cis, say, let's see just this one!"

"Very well," said Cis, calmly. Really, however, his pulses were drumming as hard as Ally's.

With the word, away dashed the boys across country on a gallop. They were only guided by the sound, which in the beginning seemed to grow clearer, but presently was duller, as though the chase had doubled on its former lines. Still, on they galloped.

Ally had looked back once at Cecil, and his shrewd eye, used to horses from his babyhood, showed him that his cousin's animal was flagging.

"Lift him easy over the logs, Cis," he advised.

"Oh, he's fresh enough," said Cecil, putting the poor beast at a larger log to prove his words.

The next instant horse and rider were sprawling in the wreck of a thorn-tree on the other side of the log. Cecil crawled out immediately, although his face was like a railroad map in red ink, with scratches; but the horse lay on his back, helplessly kicking.

Ally's face was solemn as he approached. He

shouted to Cis to stand off. Instead, Cis ran to help him, with the natural result of narrowly escaping having his brains knocked out by a chance kick, in the brute's struggles before he managed to stand again. When he did stand it was in a very shaky, uncertain fashion.

"I'm afraid he's lame," said Cecil.

"I *know* he is," answered Ally, with the calmness of despair.

An apology for the recklessness that had brought this mischance upon them trembled on Cecil's tongue; but the pride that so seldom checks our hasty anger, or injustice, stopped his first impulse of repentance; he was silent.

Ally it was who said suddenly, "Well, there ain't nothing for it now but to find the road and go home the best we can."

"I suppose so," said Cecil.

Very slowly and sorrowfully did they turn to retrace their steps. To their dismay, they discovered that there was no trail for them to turn upon. The hard ground carpeted with cypress-needles showed no smallest print of a horse's hoof. The cypress and gum trunks were thick on either side. Had they been in the canebrake, their path would have been like a lane; but a forest-fire had

swept away all the underbrush. Before they had been walking five minutes Ally reined in his horse.

"It's no use, Cis," said he; "the track is plumb gone. I haven't the least notion on earth which way that wagon-road is."

"Could we strike across the other way," Cecil asked, "after the hunters?"

"Listen!" said Ally.

They heard the notes of the horn, but fainter. Fainter still they came again. The yelps of the dogs were muffled.

"They are in the cane," said Ally.

"But your horse is fresh; you ride on and get them. I'll stay here."

Ally shook his head. "And how am I to find you again if I *do* find them?" was his impatient answer. "No, we got to stick it out together. Come on. Cobbs won't know we haven't gone home, and Sally will reckon we are going to stay all night with Cobbs. There isn't anybody to help us; we got to help ourselves."

"But, surely," Cecil suggested, "there are cabins where we can stop."

"Yes, if we go the right way," said Ally. "If we take a wrong turn, we might travel all night and not hit one."

Cecil said no more. Ally proposed that he ride the sound horse, but Cecil, promptly, with cold politeness, declined the offer.

"Then let's take turns," Ally said. "It's all stuff, you understand—me doing all the riding! You'll get killed up before you know it, and then where'll we be?"

"Walking isn't going to kill me."

"Oh, killed up ain't *killed*," Ally explained the Arkansas idiom very gruffly; "at least 'tain't that way; used up, if you like it better."

Then he offered the horse again, and Cecil kept the peace by mounting. Ally led the poor lame Rasmus.

So they crawled on for perhaps half an hour. Ally's sole speech was: "Cobbs knows every tree in the bottom; he could find the way back to the road in the dark. Oh, laws!"

Cecil answered not a word. Over in the west, behind the blunted tops of the cypresses, the sun was a golden ball. A chill dampness exhaled from the black pools among the lowlands which they had approached.

It was bad enough now, but when night came on what should they do?

Afar off the wind rose in the forest in a long,

sobbing roar—a sound like nothing else. The golden ball sank low, lower; only a blood-red sky remained.

Cecil turned to Ally. He tried to read the other's pale and frowning face.

"Ally," said he, "it looks different with all this water among the trees; don't you know at all where we are?"

"If we are where I reckon we are," answered Ally, "we couldn't be in a worse place."

This was not a reassuring speech. Cecil's heart sank; but his spirits rose again at Ally's next words, uttered as he peered sharply about him, in the dusk: "There ought to be some signs of the path to the store. Yes, I see it."

"A store!" Cecil exclaimed, joyfully; "are we near a store?"

"Only a deserted store, and plumb full of ha'nts."

"Ants?"

"Well, ghosts then. We call 'em ha'nts because they haunt you."

"Oh, I don't mind ghosts; they're not half as bad as bugs."

"Don't you believe in ghosts?"

"No; do you?"

Ally wore his stolid expression and answered like a Scotchman—that is, he did not really answer at all. "Well, papa and mamma don't neither, but Cobbs does. His brother-in-law had to move to Texas on account of meeting up with a ghost."

"Don't you think we would better go on to this store?" said Cecil, loath to tackle the subject of Cobbs on any side, in spite of his curiosity as to how a ghost could act as an emigration agent. "How far are we from home?"

"'Most eight miles," answered Ally, despondently; "three miles off the road if we cut through the swamp by the old cross-road. Like's not we should get mixed up, too."

"Can you find the way? Is the road plain?"

"There isn't any road now, and the trees have grown up so you can't hardly find where it was. It was a road before the war."

"Then I should say we would better go to the store and stay all night. We can build a fire, and start early in the morning."

Alan looked about him rather wistfully. "Say, why couldn't we camp farther on, and build a fire against a log?"

"But the store isn't far from here."

"May be half a mile."

"That's not far—and then we'll be under shelter."

Ally had dismounted and was leading Rasmus. He stood still, kicking the loose clods of earth with his foot.

"Surely you don't mind the ghosts?" said Cis.

Instead of the flat denial that he expected, his cousin answered very seriously: "Well, there's something queer about the place. But I'll tell you, and then, if you say go, all right. I ain't any more afraid than anybody else."

"We might be walking along that way while you tell it," suggested Cecil.

"No," said Ally, bluntly; "I don't guess you'll crave that way after I've told you. I can just as well tell it here."

Secretly, Cecil determined that he would go to the store, if only to show Ally that he was not so easily scared; but he sat down while Ally turned the horses. Then, seating himself beside Cecil, resting his elbows on his knees and his chin on his hands, Alan told the story of the haunted store. It was a cross-roads store during war times, and some guerrillas had been captured and shot in front of it. Their ghosts, it was, that made the spot terrible.

"They were mighty bad men and did a heap of

murdering"—thus Ally explained the case—"so now they just naturally can't rest in their graves, 'cause they haven't got any. They just let them lie where they were shot. Their bones are somewhere round here, Cobbs says, what the pigs didn't get; and he says that's how come they are ghosts—having no proper place to stay in."

Cecil jumped up laughing. "Well, let us go see them—if they want to show themselves."

"Sit down," said Ally; "I'm not through yet."

"Excuse me; I thought you had finished." Cecil seated himself with his usual politeness.

"It isn't all talk about the ghosts," Ally continued. "Folks have seen these ghosts."

"I fancy they were darkeys."

"The darkeys did see them," said Ally, simply, not detecting the covert reflection on his superstition, "and they 'most killed Uncle Joe Collins. He didn't run off like the others when they heard noises and saw a light in the store. He was right brave and stole up to the house to peek in—and that was all he knew; he heard a clap of thunder and saw lightning, and the next thing he knew he was laying on the ground and the stars were shining, and he jumped up and ran home, and when he got home he 'most died."

"Is that all?" said the young skeptic from the North, who showed no signs of being impressed.

"No, it isn't all," said Ally. "There was a heap of talk about it, and Cobbs's brother-in-law—he was deputy-sheriff then, and he was brave as brave, and he 'lowed there might be moonshiners there; so he and two other men went to see, and they went at night; and when they got there it was moonlight and the stars were shining, but there came a powerful loud clap of thunder; and then they saw a light in the store, that would shine and then go out. And they heard sounds like a hammer or somebody knocking. So the other two men were scared and wanted to go home, but Cobbs's brother-in-law just laughed at them and ran ahead into the house. Then the light went out." Ally paused, not to be dramatic, but to fish in his pockets for a clumsy knife. "That belonged to him," said he, lowering his voice. "He gave it to me, afterward." The boy opened the single remaining blade, which was nicked. "It was a splendid knife," said Ally, with respect.

"What became of Mr.—the man you were telling about?"

"Mr. Peters? That was his name. The men outside said they heard an awful clap of thunder,

and saw a kinder blue light, and that was all; for they went flying off, nigh scared to death."

"But Mr. Peters—?"

"His wife gave him up for dead, and papa and Cobbs and half a dozen more men went out the next morning to find him; and, if you please, they met up with him 'most ways home, walking along, white like a sheet of paper. They all began to try and quiz him and find out what he'd seen. 'What I've seen,' says he, 'I never will tell till the judgment-day! And no friend of mine will ever name it to me.' And he never did tell any more than that—not to his wife nor to Mr. Cobbs's mother or papa or anybody. And he was a plumb changed man, always sulling about—"

"Always *what?*"

"Sulling—being sulky, you know. That's what they call it. Haven't you ever seen an ox sull?"

"Didn't you ever find out what he saw?"

"Never. His own wife says she dassn't ask him, it made him so miserable, and he said if she talked to him 'bout it he would run away. He got so worked up as that. And he never would go to the store, and resigned being deputy-sheriff, and always wore a red mitten on his right hand—"

"What did he do that for?"

"Why, to hide it, of course. Oh, I didn't tell you—that was one awful thing!"—Ally's voice sank, and he edged closer to Cecil; "on his right hand there was a mark, branded in like they brand horses and cattle, and *it was Dick Barnabas's mark, like he used to brand his horses!* So folks said the ghosts branded Peters for their man, 'cause Dick Barnabas was their leader, you understand? So they all got kind of shy of him. But his wife said he was her man, and she was going to stick to him, and she didn't care if all the ha'nts on earth were after him, they shouldn't get him; and she had him join the church and go to Texas. That was 'most a year ago. Cobbs has had three letters from his sister and one from his mother, and they say he's getting over it, and folks think down there that he just naturally burned his hand. So, now you know all 'bout it."

"What did your father think?" said Cis, not quite ready with an explanation.

"Oh, he reckoned it was moonshiners; but he and Cobbs, and some more men, rode over there the next morning and searched all round, but they couldn't find anything. And papa and Cobbs"—Ally's face lighted out of its stolidity—"papa and Cobbs and Henri stayed all night. I just remember

how Sally cried, she was so 'fraid something would happen to papa, and I reckon I cried, too, thinking how the ha'nts might kill him and Cobbs. But they wouldn't let me go; just hollered on Uncle Joe Peat, and he took me home."

"Why, did you follow them?"

"Yes," said Ally, with a shame-faced look—"rode after them on my pony, with my shotgun and the sharpest kitchen carving-knife; and rode home bellering all the way, and lost the carving-knife. I tell you Aunt Cindy was r'arin' on me for that."

Cecil looked at Ally, abstractedly trying the edge of his blade with his fingers; after all, though he was such a little savage, Ally was about as brave as a boy could be. He thought of the stout-hearted, superstitious little creature, riding with his shotgun and his carving-knife; he remembered the simple admiration that both the children had shown him, and that he had taken as quite his due, being so used to flattery; and, all at once, something deep down in the lad's nature gave him some very curious twinges.

It was ridiculous for a little man of the world to feel abashed and ashamed; but Cis, recalling Ally's look of disappointment and mortification in the

morning, then recalling his conduct about the wild hog, had a taste of both these bitter sensations.

"I dare say he would have done as much for me, this morning," thought Cis, "but he wouldn't, now."

"He felt a tingling desire to win Ally's admiration back. Very likely it was this as much as anything else that made him rise and say, carelessly, "Well, we can't find the store in the dark, so perhaps we would better be going."

"You don't mean you want to stay there to-night, now you know about it?" cried Ally, his jaw falling.

"Why not? We don't believe in ghosts, and, if there were moonshiners, they will have gone a long time since. It is plainly impossible for us to get home; and I think it would be rather a lark, don't you?"

"No," said Ally; "I'd hate it terribly."

"Well, I want to see the house. I never saw a haunted house. The fellows in Chicago will laugh if I go so near a real, genuine old haunted house and don't take a peek. I say, Ally, you show me the way, and you can stay outside, and I'll go in."

Ally had resumed his dogged air. "All right," he said, rather sulkily; "if you want to go so bad, I'll carry you. But you'll wish you hadn't."

Here was not a gracious acquiescence, but, for once, Cecil did not feel disposed to criticise; in an obscure way he was touched by Alan's refusal to desert him, and at the same time his former desire to impress the Southern boy was sharpened. He felt that he hadn't shown to advantage in the hunt —flung from the horse, and saved from the boar by some one else's shooting it. When he had thanked Ally in the morning, Ally had put the thanks away, saying: "Laws! I didn't do anything. You had got your revolver again, and would have knocked him over yourself if we hadn't shot. We really hadn't ought to have shot and taken your pig from you." How many times that day had Cecil wished that they had held their hands a minute longer! What glory if he could have shot the hog himself! He wouldn't have minded the tumble then; but, now— he felt disgraced, and burned to retrieve himself by some dazzling spurt of courage. He tried to awaken Ally's enthusiasm, describing what fun it would be to tell about their adventures next morning.

"Yes," Ally admitted, doubtfully, "if we ain't killed up, some way, before morning."

But if Cecil's eloquence could not convince Ally, who certainly was not an imaginative boy, at least it fully conquered his own fancy. He could see him-

self rehearsing his adventures to the boys at home. Oh, no, he wouldn't talk of them as adventures, or brag or be a cad about it; he would just say in a careless way that he had once spent a night in a haunted house; then they would ask about it, and he would repeat Ally's grewsome tales (he would ask Cobbs about them; no doubt there were plenty of dreadful particulars); the fellows would get so excited, and he would say, "So Ally and I stayed all night." Then he would stop, and they would say, Well, what then? What happened? What was he stopping for? And he would answer, That was all. Nothing happened. There was no more to tell.

An unexpected, cynical *dénoûment* of this sort was quite to Cecil's taste. He smiled in advance over the picture.

Meanwhile, Ally, with a dejected face, was tethering the horses.

"Easier getting along without them," he muttered. "Say, Cis, I wonder how it would do to let them loose. Nig may be would get home of his own notion, and may be we could send word home where we were."

"So we could, to be sure!" said Cecil, eying Ally with a certain astonishment; why hadn't he thought of the plan instead of stupid Ally? Well,

he wasn't as sure as he had been that Ally was so stupid. Meanwhile poor Ally looked anything but cheerful. He had fished a lead-pencil out of his pocket and was writing his note on the back of a letter. His pale eyebrows were knitted, he bit his tongue in the dangerous and improper fashion that he had whenever he became excited. The letter finished, he wiped his heated brow with a very soiled handkerchief and sighed deeply.

Cecil took the paper handed to him and read: "Dear sis, we are in a mighty bad sceap fixing to go to the hantid store. Please come quick and help us. Get Mr. Crane. I reckon the hants will kill us if you dont. Im sorry I treated you so mean if I'm killed you can have my horse and my books please give mamma and papa my love and Cobbs to and my fivedollar gold piece and my silver watch. Your Loving Brother Alan R. Seyton. P S—You look after Lary."

Cecil, for once, did not feel inclined to smile at Ally's great sprawling hand and original spelling. He was touched. Lightly as he viewed the spectral perils, they were real and most dreadful to the Southern boy; yet Ally did not dream of deserting him.

"He is braver than I," thought Cis. He felt

ashamed of his supercilious treatment of the simple-hearted boy. Yet he couldn't quite bring himself to abandon his gorgeous visions of shining as a specter-tamer. He handed back the note, merely saying, "That is just the thing."

And Ally carefully (his tongue still between his teeth) tied it on to Nig's bridle with a bit of twine. Almost as if he could understand and would speak, the horse arched his neck, looked steadily at Ally with his liquid eye, and then, turning composedly trotted off into the darkening wood. Rasmus limped after him.

CHAPTER XI.

"HA'NTS!"

THE two boys watched the horses out of sight. Neither spoke, but each was conscious of a lonesome, chilly sensation, like the night air.

Involuntarily both looked at the red ball sinking behind the black trees. Ally spoke. "We better make haste," said he, gruffly, "if we want to get to the store before dark." With that he struck into the underbrush. Cecil followed him, saying nothing.

There was a clearing about the store. When the boys came out into the open, they could see the black and battered shape outlined against a dim, steel sky.

Once it must have been a substantial building; but the roof had settled awry, doors and windows gaped, the shingles had peeled from the roof, the bricks were tumbling from the chimneys, and the floor of the porch on one side had sunken away

from its supporting column, which, by consequence, was poised crookedly in the air, giving the whole porch the appearance of just stepping off from the house.

Ally had come to a full halt. "There's a right smart of room under that piazza," said he. "What you say to camping under there? We could be right snug and comfortable."

"And not go into the house?"

"There ain't nothing to see in the house."

But we could build a fire— A sudden clutch of his arm cut the words short. Ally pointed to the store. They both saw it—a long, thin, torch-like flame, that leaped athwart the black square, once a window, quivered, and sank.

They both heard it—the tap-tap of a hammer!

"Let's run, Cis!" whispered Ally. He did run a little space; but, when he was aware that Cis wasn't with him, he came back. Cis stood, rather white, examining his revolver. The house was dark and still. Hearkening and holding their breath, there came a harsh, wailing cry, that made Cecil present his pistol.

"That ain't nothing but an owl," said Ally; he was shivering, but he did not look as pale as Cecil.

"I'm going up to that house," said Cecil, firm-

ly; "a fine story we'll have to tell to-morrow if we hear a noise and run!"

"Cobbs says 'tain't no disgrace to run when there ain't nothing to be got by staying," said Ally, the cautious.

"But there is something," urged Cecil; "may be we'll find the ghost."

Strange to say, the prospect didn't appear to tempt Ally.

"I don't believe it's anything but tramps," said Cecil, putting on a bold front, which, to tell the truth, he was far from feeling, "and if it is, perhaps they'll have something to eat. Anyhow, I'm going to find out."

He would have run across the clearing had not Ally detained him.

"If you're going," said Ally, "you might as well go quiet like round by the trees. If it's tramps, it won't do any harm; and if its moonshiners, it will be a heap safer. Hush, now! Do like I do."

Very cautiously, in Indian fashion, skirting along the trees in the shadow of an evergreen hedge, the lads crept up to the house. Certainly, sounds came from the house, and no starlight or sunset ever lighted up the rooms like that. Never-

Cis knew that Ally saw something horrible.

theless, though they could hear their own hearts beat, they kept on. Outside the hedge Ally fell on his hands and knees, and so crawled up to the wall of the room that seemed to be lighted. The weather-boarding had huge cracks, through which (so slightly are Arkansas houses framed) one could see plainly into the rooms behind.

Ally glued his eyes to a crack. Cecil instantly crept to his side. Before he could look, he felt his cousin's cold hand on his lips. A kind of electric tremor of emotion ran from one young creature to the other. Somehow Cis knew that Ally saw something horrible, and just as surely he divined that this sight of horror was an overwhelming surprise.

If he didn't see, he could hear. There came a rattle of hammer-blows, a deep hum of voices!

Cis pushed closer. He answered Ally's dumb caution with a nod before he peered through the crack, to recoil as if he had been shot, stifling an exclamation. Instantly Ally pulled him away, and began with infinite caution to crawl back into the shelter of the hedge. Swiftly as he could, Cecil crawled after him. Ally motioned him to pass him—to hurry. The boys' faces were white; they tore their hands and knees on the hard ground as

they pressed forward in frantic haste, that yet never made a sound.

Not until they stood in the shadow of the cypresses, rods away from the house, did they venture to speak; even then it was in a whisper, while they caught each other by the arm, trembling.

"Cis," whispered Ally, "did you see?"

"Dawsey!" whispered Cecil back.

"He'd have done us as he did Cobbs's brother-in-law," said Ally, drawing a deep breath, "or worse. Oh! ain't he a terrible wicked man!"

What, then, had the boys seen? The scene might not strike every one as a spectacle to send two brave lads scampering off on all-fours like frightened mice.

They had looked in on a bare room, furnished with nothing beyond a lamp (the broken chimney of which explained the ominous flickering light), a stained pine table, a box with a tangle of green-covered wires, bottles and brass knobs near it; a heap of rings and small, round, flat, black objects strewed over the table; a kettle smoking in the ruined fireplace; an anvil in one corner, littered with hammers and sledges, and a cheap, strong trunk in the other.

Dawsey and two other men were the occupants of the room.

Dawsey stood before the fire, looking at something in the palm of his hand. One of his companions hammered at the anvil; the other, with bared and dripping arms, bent over the box. His hands were full of silver.

Perhaps a boy might suppose that this scene meant only an honest workshop—perhaps, again, he might guess that the men were counterfeiters; and that what they made was base money to defraud the Government and rob the poor.

Ally knew very little about counterfeiters, but he knew a great deal about Dawsey; the real meaning of the scene—more than that, the true explanation for whose mysterious horrors of fright and torture that his father had sought to solve in vain—flashed over him with paralyzing completeness, swallowing up every other sensation in a panic of fear and fury. Rage as much as terror shook Ally's nerves, while Cecil only realized their danger.

"They must have caught that man," said he, "and burned his hand, and made him swear not to tell!"

"I reckon they hurt him *awful*," Ally muttered, "and made him swear awful things, too!

And, then, he knew they were going on doing their wickedness and he couldn't stop 'em, and that's what made him feel bad."

"I dare say they hit that negro man with one of those hammers."

"They 'lowed to kill him," said Ally, "but his skull was too thick." He shut the knife which he was holding in his hand.

"Dawsey would have killed us if he had found us," said Cecil, in a hushed tone, and he could not repress a shudder. "Come on; they may catch us yet!" he urged, hurrying blindly forward.

"No," said Ally, "not that way, Cis; we just have to get home to-night and to send folks over yonder. And we got to go back a little to strike the old road. That's our only chance."

"Oh, I can't!" cried Cecil.

"Well, we *have* to," said Ally, "else we'll wander about all night; and may be Sally and them will come after us, and then—"

"I'll go," said Cecil; "that would be too horrible!"

"Well, I don't know—depends," said Ally. "Not if she fetched enough of our folks along; but you see we can't tell."

Cecil, now, was as eager as before he had been

reluctant; but Ally said that they must stay in their covert until it was too dark for them to be observed from the house.

"I know where the road starts," said Ally; "there's a big dead sycamore-trunk right at the turn. We can't miss it. And in about an hour the moon will rise. Stay here half an hour."

It was a nerve-trying half-hour. The lads were chilled to the bone with fright and the nipping night air; remember, it was December. Gusts of wind rattled the cypress-branches, and the thick ropes of muscadine and trumpet-vine tangled about the gum-tree trunks. The owls hooted dismally above them. They fancied a hundred sounds of pursuit in the creaking of tree-limbs, or the splash of falling acorns into the pools of the swamp, or the piercing calls of the wood creatures.

And steadily, steadily the night blurred the lines of landscape and forest, and that dark house of crime.

Huddled close to each other, the boys waited. Ally's arm stole about Cecil's neck; Cecil's arm clasped Ally's waist; their cold cheeks touched as they whispered:

"Cis, I truly am sorry I hit you."

Then Cecil's pride broke clean down. "I was

to blame, Ally," he cried, with a sob in his voice. "I didn't mean what I said about Cobbs. If we get out of this, I'll do something nice for him."

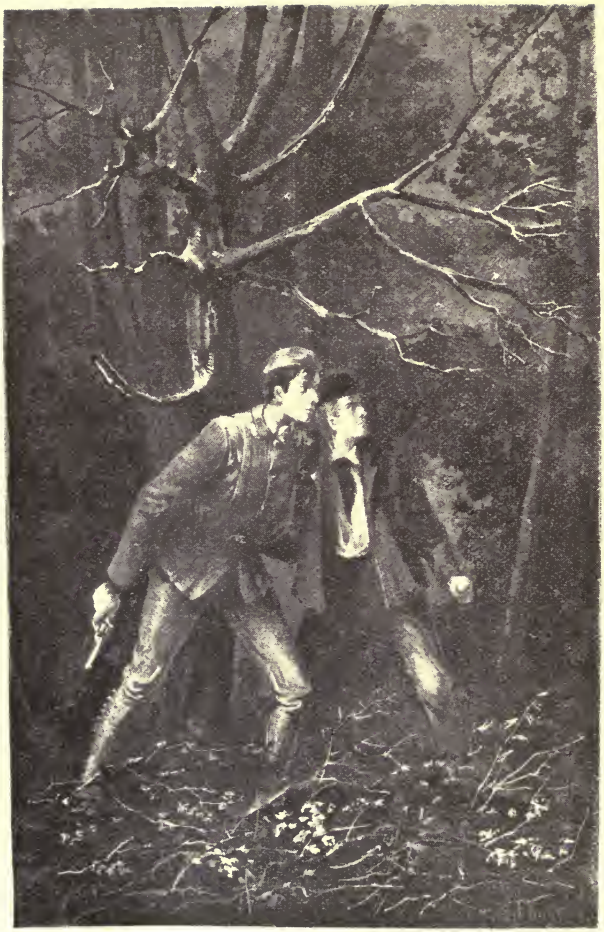
"I hadn't ought to have got so mad," Ally went on, penitently. "Ain't it queer—if I hadn't thought so much of you I wouldn't have been half so mad? Say"—in a half-embarrassed tone—"do you know I wanted to cry and hit you at the same time? I never did see a boy I liked as much as I do you."

And Cis—could it be the little premature man of the world who answered? "And I never saw a boy I liked as much as I do you. Now, Ally, let us be friends all our lives long, like the old knights, brothers in arms, you know."

"All right," said Ally, who had not the least idea what Cecil meant, but thought that it sounded nice and friendly. "Or like your father and mine," he added, after a second's thought.

"Yes," said Cecil, very low.

They were both silent a little while. Though he was such a big fellow, and felt desperately mortified at his weakness, the thought of his father so unnerved Cecil that the tears rolled down his cheeks. He knew what his father's grief would be if harm came to him. And he had brought Ally into the danger, too!



"Got your revolver ready, Cis?"

"It's my fault!" he burst out; "if I hadn't persuaded you, you never would have come."

"Well, I don't know," said Ally; "I reckon it's a good thing we found out. Come, Cis, it's dark enough."

They stood up. Then, to Cecil's surprise, Ally knelt down in the mud and covered his face with his hands. "I 'most forgot to say my prayers," said he, simply; "papa always did say his prayers before he went into battle. Got your revolver ready, Cis?"

"It's ready, Ally."

Ally nodded. He stole softly out of the wood, Cecil close behind. They heard the hammers ringing, but the window must have been screened in some way, as the only sign of light was through the gaps in the walls.

They ran. Their feet made no sound on the soft ground. They ran and ran—past the sycamore, down the clear space, until the breath failed them, and Ally gasped: "I reckon we're all right now; I can't see the house."

There was no time to rest; they went on more slowly. One danger had only given place to another. To Cecil there was no trace of a road, but Ally's woodsman's eye marked a kind of band run-

ning through the woods where there were no trees, or only trees of a smaller growth. More than once they were obliged to leave even this poor trail, because the water had overflowed the road at every depression. On these occasions Ally carefully noted in which direction they turned. "Go to the right, then I bear to the left, and we get back," said he; "same way going to the left, bear to the right. There'll be more of a road by and by when we come to the old corduroy."

They tramped on and on, so tired now that they were past talking. After a long time, Ally stopped. The moon rode high in the heavens. He could see down the road. He leaned forward.

"There were two roads here once," he muttered. I don't know which way to turn—"

Then he suddenly pulled Cecil into the shadow of the trees.

"Do you hear?" he whispered.

"They're after us!" gasped Cecil.

What they both heard distinctly was the galloping of horses.

CHAPTER XII.

VANCE'S MESSAGE.

MEANWHILE how had it fared with Sally?

Vance forgot to deliver the message. Forgetfulness was not rare with Vance, he being, according to his mother (and she ought to know), "de triflin'est nigger in de Black River bottom." But to-day he had a valid excuse. This was how it happened:

As Vance slowly dragged his heels through the sandy road to the ferry, discontent rioted in him. He looked at the woods where the persimmons were just right; and he thought of the knives to polish, and the water to "pack up," and the wood-boxes to fill, and that detestable churn waiting for him, and it seemed to him that he was the most defrauded colored boy in creation.

"I'se so tired," was Vance's plaintive moan, while he crawled along at a snail's pace—"I'se so tired, and I cayn't git time to breave! Ever'body

on earth makin' me run errants! Dar come Mist' Rufe Baxter. Expec' *he* fixin' to make me go somewhar. Folkses mus' t'ink I got iz many legs iz a caterpiller, fum de runnin' dey axes uv me!"

But grumbling was whisked into delight by Baxter's first hail: "You Vance, you' mummer say you kin go errant fo' me to Aunt Valley Lemew's. I got a mule yere. Wud ye like ter?"

A long ride through the woods, with indefinite opportunities for tarrying by the wayside, "long er gittin' mired up."—Vance turned a handspring of joy. "Yes, Mist' Baxter—yes, sah, I likes it fine!"

Baxter moored his boat and rode his mule ashore. Then he explained the errand, which was, to obtain from Aunt Valley (for twenty-five cents, intrusted to Vance) some rabbit's brains to rub the Baxter baby's gums, and a bit of rabbit's stomach-skin to hang round its neck, because the baby was fretting with its teeth; and, as any darkey can tell you, nothing will help teeth-spasms like rabbit's brains and a bit of the stomach tucked under the child's frock. "An' you mummer say," Baxter concluded, "you is to make haste; an' she doan want nare pussimmons, so ye doan need t' stop an' pick 'em; an' she doan want nare sassafras nur nare wood-truck 'tall; so ye doan need to make out like

ye stopped to git some fo' her. You is jest to go like I tole ye. You heah me?"

Vance was as ready to promise as he was slack to perform. He rode off in a blissful mood. And a beautiful ride he did have. Just to live is so pleasant when the sun shines and you are a black boy with the sharpest of eyes and limberest of arms and legs, and no more conscience than a squirrel.

Vance timed the "turrible bad road" so well, that he got to Aunt Valley's exactly in season for her midday quail-pie and coffee. Aunt Valley's snares defied the game-laws; and she liked the taste of "wild meat." With the quails and fried sweet-potatoes appeared a smoking pan of corn-bread, flaky and golden-brown, "wid" (to quote Vance) "a plumb hebbenly smell."

Aunt Valley was a cook before she was a conjure-woman. She often said, "Ain't nuffin I likes better'n t' cook a nice meal er vittles fo' a man pusson dat hab got 'preciation."

She greeted Vance hospitably; gave him the brains in a vial and the dried skin neatly slung on red twine (that she had begged at the store), took the quarter, and pressed the customer (by proxy) to "dror up." Little urging was required. Vance

got his dinner, and Aunt Valley got all the "big house" gossip that Vance knew.

A small, pale girl came in, just as they sat down, and would have run away again; but Aunt Valley called her back: "Come in, Rose Ma'y; nobuddy gwine moless ye."

The girl edged herself behind the table, to an accompaniment of explanation by Aunt Valley. "She am a po' orphin chile dat come down on de cyars wid her maw to visit her aunty at Promussed Lan'; an' her maw, she did drap down daid in de kyars" (Aunt Valley had a lurid fancy), "so I'se a-keepin her twell her aunty kin come fo' her."

"Well, *sir!* ain't dat hard? De po' little trick!" said Vance, decorously; all the while thinking, "Ef dat doan be Larry Harkness, he sho' got a twin sister."

I don't suppose Aunt Valley was deceived by Vance's long face; for she was a very shrewd old woman, and she knew well enough that the talk about Larry's disappearance would reach Vance. It may be that she had a kind of relish for her fictions, which she enjoyed at her ease, secure in the universal hatred of Dawsey, and the terrified respect felt for her by her own race. She knew that Vance no more dared to "mad Aunt Val-

ley" than he would dare to box his mother's ears.

"Well, now, honey," she continued to her coffee-cup, after a refreshing gulp, "I doan be so sho'. Dat chile's maw did treat her outragis. She used to stan' ober her wid a hickry, an' ef she didn't go straight ahaid, she jes wropped it roun' her. But Rose Ma'y, she tempers her paw, and minds right good. Her paw ben a mighty nice man an ben struck by lightnin', an her unlies' brudder ben et up by de hogs."

Vance allowed himself a feeble grin. A grin on a negro's face doesn't imply merriment only, but a medley of feelings: he may be pleased, he may be frightened, he may be angry—in fact, there is hardly any emotion that a negro can't fit with a grin; therefore, Vance grinned.

Meanwhile, Rose Ma'y, not in the least affected by the calamities in her family, ate silently and fast.

Aunt Valley enlarged on her theme. She gave the minutest and ghastliest particulars of the only brother's end, until the black listener's eyes rolled in his head.

"An' how come, is you axin me" (Vance hadn't opened his mouth except to gape with horror) "how come dat boy git dem hogs after him? I tell you.

He did chase de li'le piggies jes to devil 'em, an' de big pigs git ayfter him."

Aunt Valley fixed an awful eye on Vance. "I seen boys, heap er times, chasing a passel er li'le pigs," said she, in a deep voice. Vance's teeth chattered; *he* remembered a boy who had chased pigs no later than that morning.

"My ole mammy offun tell me 'bout de big conjure hog. Dem boys meet up wid *him* some day, den dar be fun; but de *boys* won't hab it!" her voice breaking in a harsh cackle of laughter.

"Oh, laws! Aunt Valley, what 'bout dat conjure boar?" gasped Vance; "whar does he run?"

Aunt Valley, in a gloomy and impressive manner, filled her coffee-cup; more gloomily, more impressively she drank the coffee, rocking herself to and fro between gulps, and gurgling broken sentences of blood-curdling mystery. "Shill I tell the chile? It's awful secrut! Mymy, mymy, if dat boar does be a-harkin', he t'ar de hairt out wid his tushes, sho'! No walls kin hender *him*. Oh, how high he is! Laws, de eyes er him! Laws, de tushes er him, dreepin' wid blood! *Oh—h, holp! oh—h, holp! oh—h, holp!*"

The last was in the eerie negro wail that pricks the nerves like needles.

The wretched Vance turned an ashen, muddy brown, which is the negro tint for pallor.

Even Rose Ma'y stopped munching and stared.

"Mo' coffee," moaned Aunt Valley.

Rose Ma'y filled her cup, while Vance, with trembling obsequiousness, tipped over the cup that served as a sugar-bowl and flooded the saucer with milk.

"Is dat de manners you larns waitin' on de quality?" Aunt Valley demanded, sternly; but she allowed herself to be pacified, and finally did tell the story of the conjure boar. I never heard it from any one but Aunt Valley, and I incline to consider it her own invention for professional purposes; just as the lizard (which any skillful conjurer can throw into people) is used by her brethren of the black art.

The conjure boar is different. He is as much bigger than other wild hogs as he is more ferocious and powerful. He is so strong that, when he wants pecan-nuts, he needs only to rub himself against the tree, whereupon the tree shakes violently, and bushels on bushels of nuts fall. His dreadful teeth are so sharp that he bites off limbs of trees with them. He outruns the deer in the woods, and he tires the fishes in the rivers; and he can see at night, like the

owls. But the most nightmare accomplishment of this monster is his power to transform himself into a little feeble pig with a red nose. In this shape the unwary small boy will sometimes pursue. Woe, woe to that boy! The way the conjure boar (who swells and swells until he bristles in his original proportions) devours him by slow stages is really, as described by Aunt Valley, too appalling to repeat! Aunt Valley had a peculiar heart-rending shriek (the property of the small boy in transit into the boar) and an indescribably terrifying and ravening clash of teeth (the boar's teeth) that made a boy afraid to go home alone.

Even Rose Ma'y looked scared and stopped eating, while Vance was in a state of abject terror.

"Dat ar conjure boar cayn't hu't *me*," concluded Aunt Valley, "nur he doan crave ter, kase I'se allus good t' beastes; but if," with dark significance, "I ben a boy dat chase li'le pigs—Is'e 'lookin' out when I'se in de woods, dat's all. 'Kase—you hush!"

"O Aunt Valley, what dat?"

What indeed? A hoarse, unearthly, crackling roar!

"It's *him!*" yells Rose Ma'y, who can stand no more, and disappears in two leaps—one over the chair, the other through the door.

The apparition at Aunt Valley's.

Howl after howl rolls out of Vance! Not enough stiffening left in *his* legs for flight; he is only a squirming heap on the floor.

"Get up, you Vance, and look behind you!" bawls Rose Ma'y, having mustered courage to look around; "'tain't nuthin' on earth but a mule."

Vance came out of his trance enough to fling one glance over his shoulder. Behold, at the "lean-to" door, four mild, long-nosed brute faces peeping in, as usual, for their dinner! The mildest, longest-nosed mule wrinkled his nostrils, bared his teeth, and brayed. Then Vance did manage to rise flabbily and wobble into a chair.

But could any one expect him, after such an experience, to mind Master Ally's word to Miss Sally? Why, he was so scared that Aunt Valley had to come home with him in her wagon. He was so scared that it didn't occur to him until the next morning that the braying mule was Mr. Henderson.

But Vance's forgetfulness had consequences. Had Sally received the message, she would have gone directly in pursuit of the boys; for she would not have been misled, for a moment—Ally was stupid to expect such a thing. It is a question whether the boys would have joined in the hunt;

in any case, they would have gone straight home —no "ha'nts," no counterfeiters, then!

Well, you know that Vance didn't deliver the message; and Sally went about her morning duties in peace: consulting with Aunt Cindy, dusting the ornaments, arranging the holly and red berries in the vases, all very conscientiously, like the little born housewife that she was. She found Ally's chessmen, too, in a crack of the hearth; and then wrote a long letter to mamma, telling her some very private surmises of her own concerning Dawsey and the Ku-klux. These various occupations kept her from missing the boys before dinner. Dinner, South, is sometimes at half-past one, sometimes at half-past two. To-day, dinner was at half-past two to allow Aunt Cindy's sweet-potato pone due time for baking. The sweet-potato pone, I should explain, is not bread (pone usually means a loaf), but the most delicious of puddings, made, like Mother Goose's little girls, of "sugar and spice and everything nice," including candied lemon-peel, preserved ginger-root, and citron. At two o'clock, Aunt Cindy pronounced the pudding to be "far nuff 'long to dish up dinner." So Rufe was sent to blow the horn for the boys.

"And why doesn't Vance come help Relia set

the table?" said Sally. Aunt Cindy could account for Vance, but there was no clew to the boys' wanderings.

Rufe crossed the river and blew the horn at the store. He went down to the gin, he went to the smithy, he looked in at the carpenter-shop, and Mr. Crane's house. Finally, he met Mitchell, who had seen the boys ride off. Vance had brought them their horses. Vance might know where they had gone.

There was no Vance to consult. Sally had her own opinion.

"Anyway Cobbs will sure send them back," she thought, resolved to wait a little while for Vance. She ate her dinner. Aunt Cindy bemoaned the unappreciated potato-pone, "dat dem boys had orter knowed 'nuff to stay an' eat," and promised Vance "de bud, sho', fo' takin' his time and pleasure dat a way, an' not makin' haste." I may note here that Vance did not get the "bud"—Arkansas for a whipping—instead he got the reversion of the potato-pone, when he finally appeared. Vance made enough of a story of his sufferings to appease his mother, and enhance Aunt Valley's reputation. Besides, there was Rose Ma'y, or Larry; all in all, he was quite too interesting to be interrupted by a thrashing.

Long before this, however, Sally had gone in search of the boys. She couldn't take Henri, because he was with the hunters. She told Mr. Crane. He did not like to leave, nor to let the other clerk go, because it was a busy time at the store. The cotton-wagons were coming into the gin, and the farmers or "renters" who brought the cotton liked to tarry a little at the store for purchases.

"We're shaort-handed anyhow," remarked Mr. Crane, patting Sally's pony with a worried look —"so many at the hunt, and the colonel away. Say, Miss Sally, don't you think you had better go home and wait awhile? The boys are sure to be all right. Cobbs will look after them, and there's a plain trail to get to the camp. They'll turn up at sundown, peart as peart. You see if they don't! If they *don't*, why, we all will hunt them up. Or, say, don't you want to come in and see the new Christmas goods? There are some breast-pins and ear-bobs jest like you ben seekin' for Aunt Cindy."

"No, thank you, Mr. Crane," answered Sally, "I don't guess I want to see them. I'll go up to the house to see if Vance has come."

"Yes, that's a good girl," said Mr. Crane, and

plunged back into the cotton accounts and Christmas bargains.

Mitchell, who was cleaning his boots with a stick on the front-store steps, in such a position that he could hear the talk on both sides the door, threw away his stick and straightened himself to watch the little girl.

"Two to one," said Mitchell to Crane, "that your young lady rides after those boys."

"Oh, no, sir, she won't," said Crane, giving Aunt Pearl Hotchkiss her last bundle; "she's the best girl on earth.—No, Aunt Pearl, we point-blank cayn't sell you anything more. You won't have ten cents coming to you Christmas."

"Looks like you all don't encourage customers much," said Mitchell.

"We wouldn't have much to encourage *us* at the end of the year if we did," said Crane.

"Well, that may be. Say, I don't guess there'll be any pressing need of me at the blacksmith-shop; and, if you'll furnish me with a horse, I'll carry Miss Sally to the camp."

"All right," said Crane, who knew that Mitchell was to be accommodated in every way, "but I don't guess you'll need to."

Nevertheless (inwardly fuming at Mitchell's no-

tions, and demanding to himself, Why didn't the feller tend to business, and find out about the Ku-klux, instead of forever loafing at the store?), Crane ordered the horse.

He hoped that Sally would prove the detective mistaken, and was almost angry with her when he beheld her on the ferry-boat. A little later she was riding past the gin down into the bottom; and Rufe Baxter rode beside her.

Mitchell joined Baxter and Sally on the edge of the wood. He touched his hat and apologized to Sally so civilly that Rufe for the first time suspected the new blacksmith of a better station.

"If you don't object, Miss Seyton," was his last sentence, "I'll accompany you."

"Dat ain't no ragged man's talk," thought Rufe, staring at the outline of Mitchell's cheek-bones and one ear. "Wash hissef tew clean, back er his face, tew! *He* doan be nare po' wi'te trash."

Sally's novel title (she had only been Miss Sally before) sounded very grand in her ears; and before she had ridden a mile she considered Mr. Mitchell a very nice man indeed—not so nice as papa, of course, or Uncle Hugh Carrol, or Cousin John Raimund, or Cobbs; but nicer than Mr. Crane, and right entertaining. She prattled away to him,

grateful for his consideration and pleased with his company. He seemed so interested in papa, and in Cobbs too, and wanted to hear all sorts of things about Dawsey.

Rufe, plodding in the rear, sharpened his ears and grinned maliciously over stray sentences.

"Guv ye my word," thought Rufe, "dat man ain't no mo' blacksmiff dan turkey-buzzard does be a turkey!"

Mitchell's watch had shown some minutes past three when they started; by the time they reached the bayou, where the hunters had left the traveled road, the last red of sunset had faded out of the west. At this same hour, hardly two miles away, Ally and Cecil were standing, looking with sinking hearts at their lame horse and the darkening skies.

Sally carried two lanterns.

"Come, I like that," said Mitchell; "you're a good provider, Miss Seyton." He really felt kindly toward the bright, frank little creature.

Sally proposed that some of them should sing, in order that, if the boys were coming home, they might hear the sounds and be cheered. So Rufe, who now rode ahead with the lantern, as being the best woodsman, lifted up a splendid barytone and

sang until the woods echoed, "*Hark, fo' de tombs a dumful soun'*"—to cheer the boys.

They were obliged to go slowly, the wagon-tracks were so faint in places, and it was so dark in the woods. Thus an hour passed. They had entered the cane. Rufe was still singing; having exhausted the tombs and several negro hymns of of an equally lugubrious turn, he was now sailing at the top of his lungs through "Ziney."

"Ziney, Ziney, Ziney, now," chanted Rufe—meaning Zion—

"I wunner whut de mattah wid Ziney!
Ziney doan mohn like she uster mohn,*
O Lawd, give a h'ist unter Ziney!"

Because Rufe was so busy with the trail he did not see, and because he sang so lustily Sally did not hear; but, straight through the charred "glade" to the right, a lame horse hobbled toward them, neighing for joy.

Mitchell both saw and heard; he touched Rufe's shoulder, and called to him to listen.

"Fo' de Lawd, dat nicker p'intedly does soun' like ole Rasmus!" cried Rufe.

Poor Sally grew pale. Rasmus riderless and

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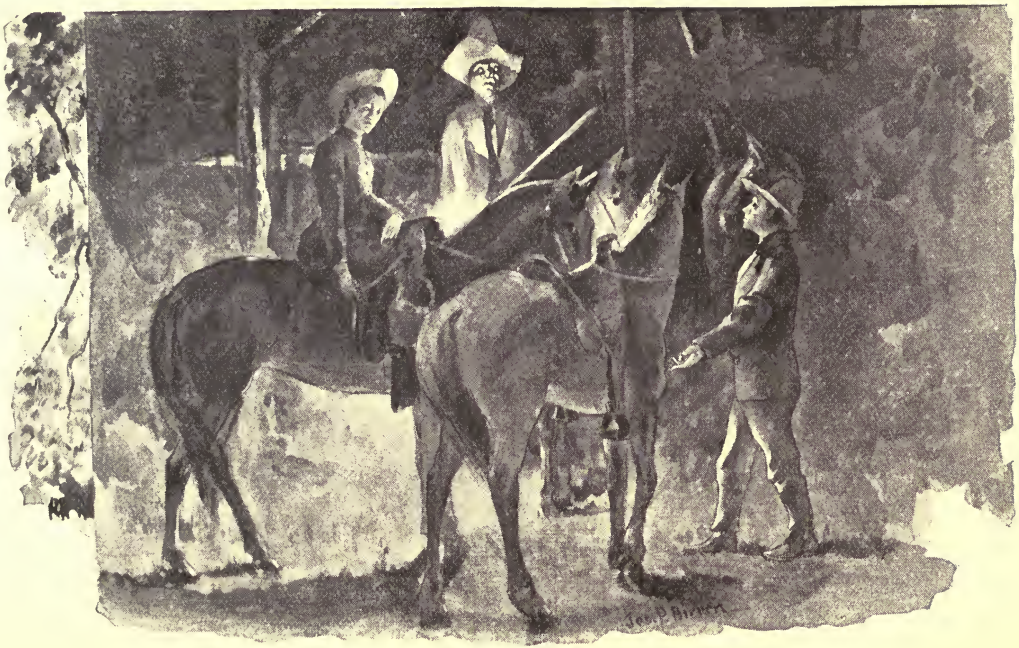
* Mourn.



Rasmus riderless and lame; what did it mean?

lame; what did it mean? They soon made sure that he had no company; for their hails and calls echoed lonesomely back to them, and there came no returning shout.

Mitchell, with a cheerful air, supposed that most like the fool horse had run away from camp.

"Reckon he made a blunder and sprained his shoulder," was Mitchell's version of the accident. "'Tis sprained, you see; and the boys thought, seeing they had but one horse between 'em, and no doubt the other horse was tired, that they would wait over until to-morrow."

His reasoning did not convince Sally any more than it did Rufe, who said patiently, "Yes, sah," to every suggestion; and privately did not believe a word. Sally did not pretend assent; her anxious little white face, in the lantern-light, made Mitchell sorry for her.

She seemed to be thinking. "Please don't go on, for a moment," she said; and the two men waited while she sat on her horse, looking wistfully down the black pathway.

Then she turned to Rufe. "What do *you* think, Rufe?" said she.

Rufe was an honest negro. he answered: "I dunno whut *to* t'ink, missy; whut *you* t'ink?"

"I think we must go on to the camp, Rufe, and get Henri. He will find Ally, if anybody can."

"And I think you have the levelest head in the crowd, Miss Seyton," said Mitchell—"hay, Rufe?"

"Yes, sah," said Rufe.

They rode on for half an hour more, when Rufe shouted, and pointed to a glow in the sky ahead of them. They were approaching the camp-fire. Presently they could perceive silhouettes of men and horses wavering against the flare.

"Looks like dey all projeckin' roun' a *hoss*," said Rufe. "Hebbenly name, hit's Nig!"

Nig it was. Being a sagacious horse that had eaten a good meal at the camp only four miles away, he decided to return there, instead of traveling eight miles to his supper.

Cobbs read the note. Cobbs believed in ghosts; but at the same time he remembered his old commander's theories of outlaws. Therefore, he got together four of the boldest spirits among the hunters and was preparing to start as our little party reached the camp. Ten minutes later they were on the road, Henri capering and barking joyfully all along the line of march. Once really in the forest,

his demeanor changed; he ran back to Sally, snuffed at the heavy boys' coats that the provident little maiden carried slung over her saddle-bow for improvident boys, who, when it is warm in the morning never imagine that it may be cold at night; looked up into Sally's face—a wistful, human look; and, when she said, "Go find Ally and Cecil, Henri—good Henri!" barked a few short barks ("Like a dog sentence," said Sally), wagged his tail, and ran to the head. From this time forward he loped sedately along, his black muzzle to the ground.

"He will find Ally," said Sally, in a confident, sweet voice, "he has promised."

"Follow the dog, men!" commanded Cobbs.

Henri led the company to the place where the boys had halted and Ally had told Cecil the story of the haunted store.

"Cudn't a gone straighter ef we'd set aout fur the store," said the old hunter who had pitied Cobbs's brother-in-law.

"Well, I bet on dogs ever' time, Mist' Rose," said a grizzled ex-Confederate comrade of Cobbs, who owned as many scars from war and hunts and river accidents as he had fingers and toes, but was, in his own words, "sich a blamed fool that he

cu'dn't no more keep away from danger than some folks cud from whisky."

Not until they had left this spot and gone on to a cypress-brake barely a hundred rods from the store, was there any flicker in Henri's confidence. Here he made his first halt, then he ran uncertainly, with a zigzag progress up and down the road, whimpering all the time, now and then barking, displaying a plain anxiety.

This was the thicket to which the boys had fled, turning on their track, after their glimpse of the counterfeiters.

His doubts didn't last. Very soon, with a loud yelp, Henri ran to a tall cypress and struck across the brake in a direction diagonally opposite and leading farther and farther away from the house.

After a second's hesitation: "Foller the dog, men," called Cobbs; "the ole man understands hisself, and I bet on him ever' time."

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END OF A WICKED MAN.

While Henri was proving himself such a trusty path-finder, Cecil and Ally picked their darkling way through the wood. At last they heard the hoofs of horses speeding over a bit of high ground. Cecil, as I have said, gave himself up for lost, and cocked his revolver, desperately resolved to sell his life dearly. But Ally leaped in the air with a shout: "Whoo-op! Whoo-op-ee! Whoo-*op-ee!* See the lanterns!" he yelled; "see Henri's white plume! Oh, see the riding-skirt! It's Sally! Sally's come herself! Hurrah! Whoo-pee!" He continued to shout until his breath gave out; then he grinned.

The next sound that Cecil heard was Cobbs's voice: "Ally, Ally, are you all right?"

It only seemed a minute until they were all halting their horses on the road, and Sally was hugging her brother and Cecil, too—quite forget-

ting her awe of her immaculate cousin—and Cobbs was trying to explain.

Ally would not let the men dismount. No sooner did he see Mitchell's face among the riders, than he called out to him and hurriedly told his tale. "You can catch 'em right at it if you go now," said the ever-practical Ally.

Mitchell's eyes flashed. He ran his keen glance down the row of men. "Seven of us," he announced, exultingly, "all armed. We can bag the whole gang."

"You'll have to count one of us out," said Cobbs; "somebody's got to look out for the cunnel's children."

"The way home is easy enough," answered Mitchell, with suppressed impatience; "besides, I'll trust those boys to find their way out of anything going."

"All the same," said Cobbs, doggedly, "them cusses mought run this way; an' the road ain't none tew easy findin.' The cunnel give me the gyuardin' of 'em, and I'll see 'em safe home."

Mitchell shrugged his shoulders. "Any one else wanting to stay and take care of children?" said he.

"Ef you mean to say, Mist' Mitchell, or what-

ever your name is, that I'm tryin' t' git outer fightin'," Cobbs began—

But Ally interrupted: "Everybody knows you'd rather fight than eat, any day, Cobbs; but don't be fighting Mitchell.—And you better make haste, Mr. Mitchell, or they all will be packing up their tools and lighting out."

"True for you, Bud," said Mitchell.—"Come on, boys. You may as well understand now that I am a detective from Little Rock, come up after this very gang you all been harboring for three years and never suspected. Ten dollars apiece to every man that follows me. I have the warrant in my pocket.—Mr. Cobbs, I was only fooling. You're quite right. If you hear us holler on you, just hold up!"

With that he was off, very willingly followed by the other men.

"We'll come too, if you like, Mr. Mitchell," Ally called after him.

But Mitchell only laughed; and Cobbs groaned: "Oh, my Lawd, Ally, ain't I givin' enough up fur to gyard you without you bein' so omstreperous!"

Ally was touched. "That's so, Cobbs; 'tis terrible hard on you," he said. "Cis and I will behave."

"Yes," said Cis, sighing.

Now, at last, was a chance for explanations.

"Well, it's lucky you came, sis," was Ally's first comment; for there'd only been Cobbs's men to fight the counterfeiters, and he would have gone to the store instead of here. Say, did you get my letter?"

"Oh, yes; Cobbs gave it to me."

"Well, that's all right; and you know I won't never be mean to you, or not ask you to go with me—anywhere."

"O Ally," cried the little girl, almost in tears, "you never are mean to me. You're just the best brother in the world." Ally submitted very patiently to be kissed; he even returned a rough boyish hug, and patted Sally on the shoulder.

"Well, anyhow, I'm mighty glad to see you," he said. "I'll be glad to get home, I tell you! I reckoned one time, out there, we never would get home. And I'm terribly hungry, too."

Cecil laughed, but Sally exclaimed, remorsefully: "Oh! how could I forget? I was afraid you would have got lost or mired up somewhere, and missed your dinner, so I put up a luncheon—O Cobbs, *please* unstrap the basket in my riders!"

"How thoughtful of you, Sally!" Cecil said; and Ally, already devouring chicken-sandwiches,

remarked that Sally had good sense. They were all three busy with the sandwiches, hard-boiled eggs, milk, and cake, when an interruption came that dispelled Cecil's appetite effectually.

Cobbs stopped in his questioning of Ally regarding his experience; he held up his hand. They all heard the reports of guns—once, twice; then the slighter rattling sound of pistol-shots; then the guns again.

"Firing back," said Cobbs.

"They've run away!" said Ally.

They listened intently, but the forest was silent.

Cobbs drew a long sigh. "I don't doubt it's been a mighty pretty little fight," said he, wistfully. "Well, it are plumb over now. Hope they got 'em."

"I hope none of them got killed," said tender-hearted Sally.

Ally had gone back to his luncheon. Cecil could not eat. It was easier to talk to Cobbs, who was the most artless admirer of the boys' heroism.

"Well, to think on't—jis' you two—not a mite afeerd!" So he would exclaim, always putting out his hand to pat Ally on the shoulder.

Cecil noticed that the horses went very slowly.

He surmised that Cobbs was delaying in hopes that the attacking party might overtake them.

So, indeed, it fell out. Some miles from the plantation they saw torches dancing behind them, and presently heard shouts. Mitchell's voice was louder than any of them.

"Oh, ask him if any of our folks are hurt!" begged Sally; and she clapped her hands with relief over the answer, "Not one."

But the counterfeiters, they soon discovered, had not been so fortunate. One of them had been killed outright; and Dawsey, after a desperate resistance, had been captured. The third man had gained his horse and escaped.

Dawsey was bound hand and foot, and placed before Mitchell on the latter's horse. With two unbandaged wounds he was a ghastly spectacle; but his eyes, dim with mortal agony though they were, met Cobbs's gaze as savagely as ever.

Mitchell briefly narrated the story of the successful surprise.

"Feller that got off is wounded; and, if we get back in time to telephone a telegram or two, we can have him stopped. This one here is hurt pretty bad."

"Killed," said Dawsey. His voice was not loud-

er than a whisper. "An' lucky I am, tew. Fur whar's the use? Convict-camps are worse—say, lemme git off this cussed hoss, and lay me down, for the Lord's sake! Lemme die, easy—if ye kin."

Mitchell, after one keen glance in the man's face, stopped his horse and bade them lift Dawsey down.

Dawsey lay back on the ground, gasping heavily. After a second he signed Mitchell to come nearer. "I'll make a clean breast of it," he groaned—and it seemed to Cecil a most horrible thing, the contrast between his faint voice and the fury of hate and balked wickedness that still burned in his eyes and distorted his face.

"It's *you* trapped me, not them —— fools! (He collected his strength for a vile oath, which he hurled at Cobbs in his weak whisper.) "I ben—yere—goin' on—that a-way"—so the strange confession went on—"for five year—nobody mistrusted but onct—we branded *him*, an' made him swar not to give us away. I wanted to kill him, but the boys was too chicken-hearted. But I marked old Dick's mark on him. A nigger come in on us afore—I hit him from behind with a hammer—but the blamed cuss's head ben so thick, didn't kill him."

He stopped a moment to gather strength. Colo-

nel Seyton always believed that this wicked man was crazy. Let that merciful explanation pass for the reason of his acts now. The men, stunned and awed by a wickedness that quite escaped their simple imaginations, stared at the dying man in blank silence. All but Cobbs. He stepped closer. "Who killed you' brother-in-law?" said he. Dawsey's face changed; something nearer human feeling softened his pinched features. He muttered the answer half to himself: "I hated the feller always, but I'd let him 'lone caount er sis, if he hadn't come to mistrust baout the money. I ben 'bleeged to kill him then. An' I jest natchelly hated the boy for favorin' of him so. Say, the boy kin have all my leavins'; he's my onliest kin."

"Another thing," said Cobbs, who seemed to have taken charge of the inquisition, Mitchell, with an amused smile, subsiding into an observer—"another thing, did ye play Ku-klux 'tother day?"

Dawsey's head was sunk on his breast; but he raised it with the same look of ferocious malice. His voice rang out in a new strength. "You, Cobbs, ye *know* I done it! Ye know better'n any one; Luke, that's gone, and him that's shot went with me, and—and—*one other man!*" By a violent effort he raised himself on one elbow, and

"You *was with me!* You *planned it all!*"

shook his free arm at Cobbs—a horrible sight, with his blood-smeared figure and the hatred in his death-smitten face. "You dast t' ax me?" he screamed. "*You* was with me! You planned it all! You—you—Cobbs!—" He struggled hideously to speak; but his jaws quivered and gasped without a sound. The movement had started an internal hæmorrhage; in five minutes Dawsey was dead, without having uttered another word.

His last effort of hatred had been successful. Mitchell was not the only one to cast sidelong glances of suspicion at Cobbs.

Cecil burst out even before Ally: "It's an abominable lie! That fellow lied when he was dying."

Ally called on Dawsey to speak again; and Sally ran to Cobbs and clung to him, crying out that nobody would believe that wicked man; but the others looked bewildered and abashed. Cobbs read their suspicions in their faces.

"Do you all believe that liar?" he cried.

They did not answer, unless it were an answer to murmur something about "looked like a dying man would be tellin' the truth."

"If you didn't do it," said Mitchell, soothingly, "you can easy prove where you were that night, and there'll be an end of it."

"Where I ben?" growled Cobbs. "I ben in my bed, soun' asleep, in course."

"Any person with ye?" said Rose.

"How cu'd thar ben when I lives by my lone?"

"That's unlucky," said Mitchell. "Well, we better be coming on."

Cobbs sank into a frowning fit of abstraction. Sally, who rode at his side, would look up at him occasionally, but she did not speak, and for the most part was equally busy with her own thoughts.

Cecil had quite gone over to Cobbs's side. He whispered to Ally: "I'm sure Cobbs didn't do it, any more than we did. The hard thing will be to account for that night. He was off hunting the mule, you know; that's what that Mitchell was after when he pumped us."

They were riding just behind Cobbs, and Cobbs had the ears of a hare. He suddenly turned in his saddle. "Well, dad gum my skin, ef it warn't that very night!" he exclaimed. "I ben studyin' an' studyin' 'baout it to get at which night it ben. My-my! mymy!"

Having thus spoken, he appeared to dismiss the subject from his mind, except that once he burst out laughing, and said to Ally, "That ar constable

feller, he thinks himself mighty blamed smart, don't he?"

But Cobbs's serenity did not quite reassure his young friends. The others in the party were divided in mind. "'Twasn't no great harm they done, onyhow"—the general sentiment was fairly expressed by one—"only I don't see how he cu'd be so thick with old Dawsey after what he done to Peters, tew. That ar's the wust thing I know baout the business."

In this fashion they talked as they rode homeward, and perhaps the only thoroughly well pleased man in the company was Mitchell. Had any one ridden close enough, that listener might have heard him mutter: "Well, there's a year's job well finished. It was worth coming up here for."

CHAPTER XIV.

CECIL DOES SOMETHING NICE FOR COBBS.

How does news travel in a small place when there are no newspapers? Somehow it must be circulated, since the hours of "preaching," the births, deaths, marriages, and every other catastrophe will be duly known in an incredibly short time. For instance, the morning after the capture of Dawsey, behold Aunt Valley Lemew, at the store, with Larry in bold attendance, full of the story. She was in all the glory of her best amber necklace and brass breastpin. Her white apron was stiff from the ironing-board and she wore a fine new turban.

But more noticeable than her holiday costume was her mule; for she was mounted on the cherished and lamented Mr. Henderson, while Larry rode Melodeon—him of "de lubly voice." "Yes'm," Aunt Valley said calmly to Aunt Pearl Hotchkiss, "yes'm, dat's Larry Harkness, sho' nuff. I ben hidin' of him f'om de wrath er de wicked,

kase Miss Sally and de cunnel's folk fotch him to me an ax me pertect him." Aunt Valley proceeded to give an account of Larry's "ganted"* and "gashly"† appearance; and described, at length, her successful treatment of the "hurtin' in his ankle." Indeed, she was so eloquent that she allured two new customers on the spot for her "sprain mextery," a colored woman with a sprained "leader‡ in her laig," and a white man with a "risin'"# on his thumb. Let me do Aunt Valley justice: her surgery in both cases was entirely successful. "An' now," she concluded, having made appointments with her patients—"now, I'se fotch de chile, yere, fo' to get de cunnel be his guardeen, now his uncle ben killed up, and look after his prupputy. Say de law guv him all ole Dawsey got."

"Ain't dat 'ar Mist' Henderson?" Aunt Pearl Hotchkiss asked.

"Well, yes'm—yes, Sist' Hotchkiss, dat does be Mist' Henderson, *Larry's* mule. De po' critter come back to me, yestiddy" (I fear Aunt Valley put

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* Ganted, thin. † Gashly, ghastly.

‡ Leader, tendon or muscle.

"Rising" in Arkansas, is applied to every kind of swelling, from a pimple to a felon.

the date forward several days), "nickerin' an' rubbin' his nose to de corn-bin, plumb starved up."

Some one else observed that Aunt Valley had discarded her usual cane. To all inquiries regarding her health, she responded, with a grin: "Heap better, sho'. De news nuff to cure heap wusser rheumatiz nur mine."

Being Saturday morning, which is the great trading day all over the rural South, the long dim room was crowded. White faces and black jostled each other. Everybody was talking at once; and the theme was always the same, namely, the wonderful happenings of the night before. Aunt Valley was the center of a group of colored people—Looney, Rufe Baxter, Aunt Pearl, Uncle Joe Peat, and others—all as eager to impart news as to receive it. Had she heard of Dawsey's blaming it on Cobbs?

Yes, she had. Well, Mist' Cobbs ben a mighty nice man, but he never did ben right kind to the colored folks. "But laws! I ain't a word to say ag'in Mist' Cobbs; de cunnel like him," said Aunt Valley; and she shook her head dismally, and took out her snuff-box, dipping her stick in it and rubbing her teeth, with the forbearing air of one who could say a world against Cobbs if she would.

Looney was franker; said he, "Well, I don't reckon they kin prove it on him, but I 'lows he done hit."

"An' him a-puttin' on dog"—this was Aunt Pearl Hotchkiss—"a-ridin' roun' de kentry axin' folkses fool questions; How many folkses come to see 'em? What kind o' hosses dey ride? an' all sich."

"It fa'rly does give me de all-overs to t'ink er Mist' Cobbs bein' so wicked!" wailed Aunt Polly Peat.

"Doan t'ink it, den," said Rufe Baxter, bluntly: "you ain't no call to. You allus 'lowed ole Dawsey ben a liar; dunno how come you is all trustin' him, jes' kase he lies bout Mist' Cobbs!"

Among the whites, Cis was Cobbs's most vigorous defender. Such a metamorphosis may seem odd; really, it was the simplest thing in the world. There were only half a dozen people alive dear to Cis; but since, yesterday, Ally Seyton had become one of the number, and I fancy that Sally had been one for days; and Cecil's affections, once touched, had no reserves. So, quite as a matter of course, he took the war-path for Cobbs, on Ally's behalf. He had been captured by a knot of idlers who were eager to hear about the tragedy from an eye-witness.

First, he must tell the story. The audience gave the most flattering attention, only interrupted by exclamations of admiration or very brief moral comments, such as—"Them wicked men never does end well," or "Waal, tell you 'taint safe to be makin' b'lieve ha'nts; now they got to be real ha'nts, shore nuff."

From the story it was an easy transition to the outlaw's charge.

"Well, to my mind," argued a farmer, "it does look sorter bad, Cobbs not bein' willin' to go with the rest to arrest Dawsey; looks like he didn't want to mad Dawsey."

"Why, you don't suppose Cobbs knew who the counterfeiters were?" cried Cecil; "do you think he knew the ghosts were counterfeiters? He hadn't any reason to like the ghosts, or the counterfeiters, after the way they treated his brother-in-law!"

"Suthin' in that!" cried the old hunter, Rose, who had wriggled his lean shoulders through the crowd up to the stove, against which he now rested the sole of one muddy cowhide boot, on a ledge, half-way up the side. "Yes, sir, thar is. What fur wu'd Cobbs be runnin' with Dawsey? They two hated each other like pizen."

May be that was pretense, some one said. Cobbs might have been in with Dawsey all the time.

Most of the company would "hate for to think that of Cobbs."

"So'd I," said a farmer; "Cobbs is a nice man. But them fellers made a turrible sight of money, and if a man was in it, he'd do 'most anything to keep on and not get caught."

Another man suggested that Cobbs did have a good deal of money lately. Last summer he had bought a cow and yearling, and paid cash, and only this winter he got a new saddle, a plumb good one, cost twenty dollars; and had they all ever seen the furniture in his house? He had a marble-top table in his parlor, and mighty pretty colored pictures —such things cost money, and Cobbs was mighty generous with his money, too. Yes, two or three agreed, he was so; Cobbs gave a heap of money away: two dollars to the colored church, a dollar to the Christmas-tree at the school-house, and fifty cents to a man with a broken leg; and he lent money, besides—two hundred dollars to Priam Kitchen and seventy dollars to a widow on Willow,* to keep her from being sold out—yes, sir, Cobbs had money.

* A small river. They always say "on Willow," or "on Black," omitting the article.

The country doctor, a round-shouldered, near-sighted, very young fellow, who kept up the dignity of his profession by a shabby black frock-coat, now struck into the conversation. He really had not the slightest feeling against Cobbs; but he, like Cecil, read detective novels, and suspected the least likely person. The idea of Cobbs's carrying on a lurid career of crime in secret, during all these years of prosaic good repute, was quite in accord with the theories. That was just how they did in the novels. He could see the possibilities, if these rustics couldn't; here was a chance to impress the community.

"Where did Cobbs get all his money," said the doctor, "and why does he lend round so free?"

"Well, I can tell you just where Cobbs got his money," answered Cecil, speaking quietly and distinctly, "and just why he gives it away or lends it. He gets it from his own hard work and his own bravery; he helped save my father's life once, and my father bought some property for him, and it has risen in value, and he gets two hundred dollars a year from it, every January. And last year, at Christmas, my father sent him fifty dollars for a present.

"It ben in January he lent Kitchen the money," muttered Rose.

"And he earns good wages because he can do more work than three—"

"That's so," said Rose.

"That's where he gets the money," said Cecil, growing a little hot over his own oratory, "and he lends it out and gives it away because he is a generous, kind-hearted man—and *you* ought to know that better than I do."

"We do," and, "Hurrah for you, Bud!" cried several voices. Evidently, whatever they thought of the Ku-klux business, Cobbs's old acquaintances would not accept him as a counterfeiter.

Old Rose shouted approval, emphasizing his words with a stamp on the stove-ledge that had like to have been dangerous, since it loosened the stove-pipe.

"There, now," exclaimed Crane from behind the counter (where he had been strictly neutral, "Selling goods, sir, and not talking about anybody")—"there, now, colonel told me to mend that pipe, and I've been 'lowing to do it all the week. —Say, Looney, git the step-ladder and give it a boost!"

"What I don't understand," said the doctor,

availing himself of the partial pause caused by interest in Looney's proceedings—"what sticks me, is how Dawsey, a dying man, could want to make such a confession for, unless it was true."

"Easy 'nuff for a feller ez full of spite like Dawsey ben," snorted Rose; "the critter'd ruther a-done a meanness than eat ary day."

"And I don't understand how Cobbs would dare ask Dawsey questions," said Cis, "if he knew Dawsey could tell such things."

"Suthin' in that," said a farmer. He turned to a new-comer, the same grizzled ex-soldier who had been on the expedition with Cobbs overnight. "Howdy, Mist' Kitchen? Looks like you' ole side partner, Sergeant Cobbs, got into trouble, don't it?"

"How's that?" said Kitchen. He heard the talk in answer with frowning attention. Some one else was listening quite as attentively—a little, stunted figure, that must stand on tiptoe to lift a peaked, pale little face above the crook of his elbow. Larry had stolen away from Aunt Valley, and was drinking in every word.

"This I call the case against Mr. Cobbs," said the doctor, pushing his soft, black hat off his high forehead. "In the first place, Mr. Dawsey's *ante-mortem* statement—"

An inquiring mind wanted to know what was an *ante-mortem* statement; was it anything like a *post-mortem*, like the cor'ner's jury made?

"You hush!" Rose rapped out testily. "Don't ye know what ante-up means? Don't ye have to do that afore ye play? Well, he antes-up with his confession afore he dies."

"First, there is Dawsey's *ante-mortem* confession"—the doctor recapitulated on his finger-tips—"made when he knew that he was a dying man, distinctly charging Cobbs with being in the gang that frightened the negroes. That's one point. Secondly, Master Alan and Miss Sally Seyton, and Mr. Cecil Raimund, here, have found the tracks of the Ku-klux." (Sensation, and all eyes on Cecil.) "They traced those tracks to Aunt Pearl Hotchkiss's house, to the Peats', to Looney's. *One of the beasts was a lame mule.* Mr. Cobbs has a lame mule." ("That's so," and "Yes, sir, he has," from the crowd.) "Thirdly, they picked up a handkerchief marked 'A. R. S.,' which stands for Alan Raimund Seyton—"

"Well, do you think Ally did it?" asked Cecil, contemptuously.

"Now, Ally Seyton," the doctor continued, not noticing this peck at him, "you all know, is a gen-

erous boy. He gives away things; he gave Cobbs two handkerchiefs, on two separate occasions, as can be proved by witnesses."

Kitchen grunted, "That ain't nothin'."

"Fourthly, they found a clay pipe. Cobbs smokes a clay pipe. Fifthly, it is well known that Cobbs has had trouble with Mrs. Hotchkiss, with Looney, Peat, and other darkeys, and wouldn't mind giving them a scare."

"Well, I don't see any great harm ben done," said Kitchen; "a few folks scared, that's the most of it."

"And lastly, gentlemen"—the doctor would not be diverted; he kept his right hand in the air, and checked off the fingers with his left—"lastly" (he tapped his right palm, having used up all the fingers)—"lastly, it can be proved that *Cobbs and his mule were not at home that night!* There's the case."

Kitchen stared at the last sentence, then he broke into a sardonic laugh. "Well, if that ain't the best out at argufyin' I've heerd in a coon's age!" he jeered. "Lord! I wudn't believe ye cud swar an innercent man guilty that a-way if I didn't hear it with my own ears.—Say, whar's Cobbs, Bud?"

Two days ago, Cecil, whom he addressed, would

have raged at such impertinence; but he knew the country better now. In a friendly manner he answered that Cobbs had gone by sunrise to send a telegram to the colonel; he ought to be back soon.

"Reckon I'll sa'nter 'long an' meet up with him, then," said Kitchen.—"Waal, good-mornin', doctor. You're a smart talker, I will say."

He left the doctor uncertain whether to consider himself complimented.

"One thing I kin tell ye," said Rose, buttoning his patched coat, "you p'intedly *was* sharp not to name counterfeiters to Kitchen."

"Why, it was *Kitchen* Cobbs lent the money to!" exclaimed the doctor, rubbing his yellow hair over his forehead.

"Yes, sir," Rose answered, grimly, "and it ben Dawsey held the mortgage and aimed to sell Kitchen out body and bones. You talk baout Dawsey bein' Cobbs's boss? Them a-workin' together? I wish you'd a seen Cobbs and his boss that day! Him an' Dawsey had words, an' he knocked Dawsey spang off his hoss into the bayou. He cyarried a black eye roun' for a week, and the mark er Cobbs's knuckles ez long ez he lived. Tell ye, I thought er that day when I seen him a-laid out on the groun',

las' night. Thar ben the scar on his eyebrow, burnin' red."

Really, the doctor was shaken; but he could not so easily give up his theories. He laughed in an embarrassed way, and said that he was sure he hoped Mr. Cobbs would clear himself; and made the excuse of a patient, and so escaped.

"Doctor got all he wanted, I reckon," said some one; and the crowd laughed.

Cecil did not wait to hear more; he, too, walked off to seek Sally. His nerves were tingling with the excitement and the success of his first speech. It was amazing how pleased he was to have moved people whom, yesterday, he would only have wanted to hold at arms' length. But he had been in danger of life and limb in company with some of these men, and they were changed to him; while as to Cobbs, the more he defended him the more he had felt certain of his innocence. By this time he was almost as warm a partisan as Ally.

Outside, Vance was sunning himself on the right-hand horse-block and counting his buttons; an occupation by no means as futile as it may seem, for Vance's buttons were the memoranda of domestic needs.

Each article of prime necessity, like rice, sugar,

baking-powder, bowls, brooms, or the like, had a representative button on Vance's jacket. Cecil often wondered why Vance had so many buttons; but Aunt Cindy knew what she was doing: there are a great many things needed in a kitchen. When Vance was sent on errands a record was made, down the front of him, by simply unbuttoning the buttons that represented the required articles.

Beside Vance rested some parcels and paper bags, one of which evidently contained sugar, for having been set on a nail, it was trailing sweetness, whitely and silently, through the rent in its side, down to two appreciative pigs below; while Vance sat absorbed in his buttons, working his lips and ducking his head as he fingered them.

Cecil hailed him: "What's the matter, Vance?"

"Why, mummer, she unbuttoned me dis time," said Vance in an aggrieved tone, "an' she done change up my buttons!"

"That's bad, but you seem to have got the things."

"No, I ain't, sah, I ain't got Miss Sally's t'ings. She changed up Miss Sally's t'ings' button. She ben rushin' me like she does, an I didn't have my mind on 'er, and now I dunno *whar* Miss Sally's t'ings!"

"Perhaps it is the right button."

"Naw, sah, dat impossible. Mummer say, 'Git 'em an' go flyin' down to Miss Sally on de clay bank below de gin.' Cayn't tote big iron soap-kettle to Miss Sally. Dat whut de nint' button mean."

"Perhaps it is the next button."

"Topper button coal-ile, unner button tin pans. Mist' Cessil, fo' de Lawd dat de ve'y one! Li'le roun tin pans! An go a-flyin'—"

"I'll take them for you, Vance."

Vance thanked him and ran nimbly into the store, returning with a clatter, the pans under his arm. They were small, round, and shallow, and what Sally could want with them Cecil couldn't fancy. However, he took them. He walked along, over the withered grass, and thought, not for the first time, how many colors Southern winter scenery can show.

The rapid river was a rich green, the distant willows were red, with a blue sky and a tumble of white clouds against the horizon-line. White cotton-bolls still spattered some brown fields; in others, the cattle were browsing, and the yellowish-brown stalks glistened in the sun. The leafless underbrush that fringed the river-bank was a dark pur-

ple. Across the river the white sycamore-trunks showed like chalk-lines amid soft grays and browns. Nearer, the great gum-tree by the gin was decked in mistletoe.

The gin-doors stood open; and the steam made a buzzing noise, sending busy white curls up against the dark roof. Cecil could see the cotton tossed and shredded by the crooked iron fingers in the room below, and the brown hooped bales tumbling out of the upper window. The river-bank projected on the farther side of the mill, where Sally ought to be. There, truly enough, she was, in her oldest print frock, with her black braids and scarlet hair-ribbon, digging in the clay.

"Whatever do you mean to do, Sally?" cried Cis.

Sally straightened herself with a sigh of relief. "There! I've got enough. Cis, I'm doing detective work."

"All right, Sally; let me help you."

"You're right kind, Cousin Cecil—"

"No, I'm not, Sally, but I want to be. Tell me about the detective work."

"Well, will you fill those pans with clay, and pat it down this way?"—Sally had a layer of clay already covering the bottom of one of the tins. "I want it for the mules to step in, you know."

"The mules to step in?"

"Yes. Don't you know what you told me about Mr. Mitchell's suspecting Cobbs?"

"Yes."

"Well, one reason he does is because of Cobbs's lame mule. Now, Cobbs didn't ride his mule to-day; and I'm going to have his mule step in one of these, and then I'm going to have all the other lame mules we know about step in. See! there are some pieces of paper, with all the mules' names written on them" — she displayed some neatly printed cards—"and we'll stick each mule's card in as soon as he's stepped in, so we sha'n't get the tracks mixed up, you know; and then we'll see if any mule's track fits the paper of the mule's track we found!"

Cecil's first impulse was to laugh, but it was instantly followed by a graver thought.

"Sally, I believe that *is* an idea," said he, musingly; "only that cad Mitchell has the pattern."

"I know," said Sally, "but I asked him for it last night, and he said he couldn't give me that, but he'd cut me out a pattern just exactly like it. He was real pleasant."

"He's a chump. Suspecting Cobbs! call himself a *detective!*" cried Cis, with as much scorn of

Mitchell's obtuseness as if he had not suspected Cobbs himself only yesterday.

"I know," said Sally, sadly—"that is awful! But he hasn't known Cobbs as long as we have, and anyhow may be he's only *pretending* to suspect Cobbs. Detectives always have to pretend, you know."

"May be," said Cecil, doubtfully. They filled their pans and then returned to get their horses. Passing the store, Sally hesitated a moment. "See Aunt Valley," exclaimed she, "and Larry! I'm going to ask her to stay to dinner. — O Aunt Valley," she called out, "stay and take dinner with Aunt Cindy at the house."

Aunt Valley accepted with a profusion of thanks. Larry, looking very woe-begone was beside her. He asked, "Whar Ally done gone?"

"Oh, he went in with Cobbs to telegraph papa. He'll be home soon."

Larry said nothing more, and, after a little talk, Cis and Sally went on their way. They had gone home, mounted, been ferried across, back again, by Rufe, and were well out of sight, before a spring wagon driven by two horses, drew up at the store-door. Two men jumped down. One was a tall, smiling, well-dressed man in a brown great-coat.

The other man did not wear such good clothes and he did not smile.

A visible sensation was created when these two men walked into the store and asked for Mitchell.

Larry pressed closer to Aunt Valley, whispering, "What you reckon the sheriff wants here?"

"More'n I knows," said Aunt Valley, placidly; "some time he come fo' taxes an' some time fo' evil-doers. Dunno w'ich *dis* time."

CHAPTER XV.

SALLY DOES A NICE THING FOR COBBS.

Aunt Valley had had a soul-satisfying season at the store. She had acquired two new patients, collected half a dozen old debts, and made application (to the sheriff) for board-money to be allowed her for Larry's "keep." Besides all this, she had enjoyed her gossip with true African relish. In high good-humor she was propelling the meek and dejected Larry to the door, when some startling news arrived.

The mail-rider announced that the sheriff, his deputy, and Mitchell, had arrested Cobbs and taken him off to jail. He had his information from an eye-witness, who said that Ally Seyton was "rarin' an' chargin'"; but Cobbs "made out like he didn't much keer."

Here was new and vast excitement. All the men and women in the store—their attention previously divided between Larry and Cecil—now clus-

tered about the latest news-bringer. Sympathy for Cobbs ran high. It was generally conceded that to send a man to the penitentiary for "jis skeerin' up a few darkies and hurtin' nary" was an overdose of punishment. Cobbs was as honest a man as ever lived.

Aunt Valley and Larry were on the outskirts, when presently Larry's agitation attracted attention. An old negro had been telling how brutally convicts were treated in the convict-camps—beaten, starved, worked to death, and flung into a hole like a dog. Larry, at this dismal climax began to whimper.

"Now, why fur ye snickerin' dat a-way?" said Aunt Valley, crossly. Larry muttered that he ben sorry for Mr. Cobbs, and Mr. Cobbs ben good to him.

"Fo' de Lawd's sake, hark to de chile!" shouted Aunt Valley. "Does ye 'low dey sen' a w'ite man to de penetenshuary fo' nuffin on earth 'cept skeerin' up a few niggers? You plumb crazy, chile. I knows better. Come long by." She would have whipped Larry under her capacious arm and departed, had not Sally Seyton run directly in her path. Sally was flushed with her ride in the cold air; her dark eyes sparkled, her pretty head was held high; she had never looked handsomer or more determined.

Cecil admired her. He stood just behind her, holding a basket in his hand. His riding-boots were splashed with mud.

"Aunt Valley," said Sally, "where has my brother gone?"

"Hark to de chile! How I know?"

"Has Ally been here, Mr. Crane?" said Cecil. But Ally had not been seen at the store.

Then Sally turned resolutely to Aunt Valley again.

"Aunt Valley, you have just got to help us," were her words.

Aunt Valley held up both hands. "How can I holp ye, chile?"

To make the protesting gesture, she released Larry, who instantly darted out of the store-door in the direction of the woods.

"Now, whar dat boy kitin' an' traipsin' tew?" cried Aunt Valley.—"Hole on, honey, wid you wantin's; I 'bleeged to kotch dat boy!"

The last words came over her shoulder while she trotted with surprising agility after the flying little shape.

"Come too, come too!" Sally cried to Cecil. "He's gone after Ally."

So indeed the boy had. He went straight as an

arrow to a favorite haunt of Ally's, the little knoll by the river-side, where he used to fish.

But could that be Ally, that wretched lad flung on the grass, sobbing as if his heart would break?

He clambered to his feet at the sound of their approach, and put on a miserable seeming of composure, ramming his hands into his pockets and assuming to be watching for fish, while his eyes were all red and swollen with crying, and his cheeks in streaks for the same reason.

Sally flew at him. "O Ally, don't feel so bad! We'll get him out." That was what one would expect Sally to say.

But Larry did an astonishing thing. He was quite out of breath with his hard running, and had done nothing but stare at Ally; now he spoke. "Nev' you mind, Ally, don't you take on; they all sha'n't hurt Mist' Cobbs; Mist' Cobbs didn't done it. *I* done it! Aunt Valley an' me. An' now," gasped Larry, his feelings overcoming him, "they kin take me off to them convict-camps an' kill me an'—whop me—an'—not let me have nothin'—to *eat!*"

Aunt Valley reached the scene in time for the last sentence. She broke out in wrath: "He does be lyin'—lyin'! Dat chile, how cud he done sich

"I done it! Aunt Valley an' me," gasped Larry.

t'ings?—You, Larry, how come you goin' dat a-way? You want dem drivers t'ar ye to pieces?"

Larry shuddered; but he kept his eyes fixed on Ally.

"I don't keer. I won't have Ally feel bad."

But, now, Sally took command of the situation. "Aunt Valley, you know all about it; you've got to tell us."

"Bressed Marster! *Me?* I doesn't know nary!"

"And *I* know, too," cried Sally, with an imperious air, the effect of which on the negro woman was very strange to see. "We found Larry's handkerchief," Sally went on, "yes, and your pipe, and, Ally doesn't know, but Cis and I went this morning and we found the mule that made the tracks."

"De tracks!" bawled Aunt Valley; "waal, missy, so Mist' Mitchell done, an' dey does say he ben a constable from de Rock an' nare blacksmith 'tall; an' he foun' de tracks er dat lame mule o' Mist' Cobbs; dat how come he mistrus' him in de fustis place."

"There are other lame mules besides Cobbs's," said Sally, steadily; "there's Abraham Lincoln, for instance; he's been lame a long spell.—Cis, show her!"

Out of the basket, while Aunt Valley glared at every motion as a wolf might glare at the jaws of a trap slowly closing on him, Cecil took two tin pans or plates filled with moist clay and each ticketed with a slip of white cardboard. He handed them to Sally. From his pocket-book he removed a scrap of brown paper, which he unfolded, showing it to be in the shape of a mule's hoof.

"That paper," said Cecil, "is the precise shape of the mule's tracks which we found at the ford, in Aunt Pearl Hotchkiss's yard and close to Looney's. This"—he lifted one of the pans, and they all saw the distinct mold of a mule's hoof—"this is the footprint of Cobbs's mule. You will see, when I put the paper on it, that they don't agree in the least."

They all saw; indeed, there was a full half inch of rim all round the pattern, in the print.

"Large foot Cobbs's mule has," said Cecil; "now here—thank you, Sally—*here* is the print of Aunt Valley's lame mule, Abram Lincoln—"

"It's no use, Aunt Valley; I ben goin' to tell!" cried Larry.

"The best thing you can do," said Cecil, calmly putting the basket to rights. "There's the clay pipe, too, with a nick in it. Mitchell has it safely.

You were smoking a clay pipe at the store one day, Aunt Valley, and it dropped and broke, and Sally was there and bought you another, which has a little scallop or nick in it. There is just exactly such a nick in the pipe that we found. Want any more evidence? Or will you tell, and let us see what we can do for you?"

Aunt Valley hugged herself and swayed to and fro, moaning.

"Yes, Aunt Valley, you better tell," said Sally.

And Aunt Valley did tell, seeing no escape. She and Larry were all the Ku-klux that there were—the old woman, the boy, and the two mules that followed the others, docile as usual, mounted by pillows wearing old hats. Aunt Valley herself was not nearly as crippled by rheumatism as it suited her purpose to appear. In Uncle Hobson's old clothes, with Dawsey's gun, she figured bravely as leader of the band, represented by Larry (armed with two tin pans and a dinner-horn) and the two mules with the pillow riders. They made a formidable enough band for such a timid race as the negroes.

The motive was plain. She hoped to so excite the odium of the country-side as to force Dawsey to run away. If the negroes or the whites lynched

the old man and killed him, so much the better, thought the revengeful old woman. She knew about Dawsey's habits, his mysterious visitors, his midnight absences. She imagined that he was making moonshine whisky — for neither she nor any one suspected that false money was being coined; the shrewd counterfeiters circulated none of their base coin in the neighborhood.

Aunt Valley had no hope to convict Dawsey of any such popular offense as making whisky. Then came the brilliant idea to fasten a fictitious crime on him, taking advantage of his real absence.

By occasional gifts of food to the half-starved boy, for whom she felt a certain sympathy as a fellow-victim of Dawsey, she had won his confidence. It was not hard to engage him in the plot by which the crafty old woman planned to frighten Dawsey out of the country. In her simplicity she expected that she could walk over and take Mr. Henderson away, once Dawsey was gone.

Larry had written the notes, but Aunt Valley had fired the gun, Larry helping on the dinner-horn, and also clashing the two tin pans together with a frightful clatter.

Such was the sum and substance of Aunt Valley's confession, made with many sobs and groans;

for she was now thoroughly repentant because thoroughly scared.

Sally took the *rôle* of comforter.

"Never you mind, Aunt Valley and Larry; we'll protect you."

"If we can," said Ally, who couldn't forget his caution.

"We will, anyhow," said Sally, her eyes glowing. "Why, Ally Seyton, do you mean you won't protect Larry after he has confessed for your sake, and got Cobbs out of prison—or just the same thing—and there he is, trusting you so! Will you be so mean as to desert him?"

"Oh, put your eyes back, sis," said Ally, easily, "I didn't say I wouldn't; I was only talking about couldn't. May be they better light out. *We* can tell the sheriff."

"No, we can't; he'll say we are making it up to get Cobbs off." Ally was dumb.

It was Cecil who finally suggested that they get a written confession, and then that Aunt Valley and Larry take the train at the station and go away. He would furnish the money.

"O Cecil!" cried Sally, "you always think of the right thing."

"Doesn't he!" said Ally, admiringly. "But I

think it was pretty bright of you, sis, thinking of those prints.—Now, Larry, don't you go to looking scared; we'll take care of you."

"And won't I see you never no more?" said Larry, miserably.

"Why, of course; they don't need to stay, do they, sis?"

"And, Cecil, where must they go?" said Sally.

"They might go to Little Rock, to mamma," Ally broke in. "Say, don't you know Aunt Ernestine is always wanting a cook? And Aunt Valley can cook for her, and Larry can wait on table."

Anything more preposterous for table service than Larry's figure Cecil thought that he had never seen; but then he remembered Vance, and wasn't sure that Aunt Ernestine would be so critical.

On the whole, the plan seemed feasible. Aunt Valley groaned assent, and Larry said he was willing to do whatever Ally wanted.

"Well," said Ally, "it's time for dinner, so let's all go home, and after dinner they can do it."

Larry dined with the children, eating a very large meal with every sign of appetite; but, I dare say, Aunt Valley did not eat so heartily in the kitchen.

After dinner they all assembled in the living-

room, where Sally had provided writing materials on the famous *marqueterie* desk.

"We'll have to write it," said Cecil.

"Hadn't they better write it themselves? May be they'll say we made it up."

"Oh, it isn't necessary. They sign, you know, and there can be witnesses."

"Besides," said Sally, "they can't write well enough. Aunt Valley can't write at all, and it would take Larry till plumb dark, and then he wouldn't do it."

"But they've got to sign it!"

"Oh, yes, and say 'I acknowledge this to be my voluntary act and deed.' That's the way papa does when people come to sign deeds. He says that to them, and they say 'I do.'"

Aunt Valley uttered a deep groan. "I nev' did know it ben a waller in *ary* act," she protested. "I jis 'lowed to git ole man Dawsey outer de kentry. Nor I never did hurt nary."

"Oh, that's all right, Aunt Valley," said Alan; "that just means you're willing to sign to please us."

"An' kase missy, she done foun' out," said Aunt Valley. "Oh, Lawdy! Missy, is I got to go 'way an' leabe my mules?"

"How are you going to begin it, Cousin Cecil?" said Sally, avoiding an answer. "Oughtn't it to begin like wills—'In the name of God, amen'—so as to be kind of solemn like? I know that's the way wills begin, 'cause I read a story all about a bad man that burned one."

Cecil didn't think that the beginning of a will was exactly like the beginning of a confession. He rather inclined to "Know all men by these presents."

"What presents?" said Ally; "they can't give us any presents."

"Oh, that's just a form—to make it sound better."

"Why don't you put them both in, then, and then say they did it?"

So, after a little writing, Cecil said:

"Know all men by these presents: In the name of God, amen! We, Mrs. Valley Lemew and Laurence Harkness, were the parties who were the Ku-klux and scared the negroes on the night of—"

"What night was it?" Cis broke off to ask. At the same instant he glanced out of the window, his attention attracted by the sound of wheels.

What he saw made him turn pale, and dart out

of the room, crying, "Ally, they've all come!" Ally, too, ran to the window. "Hurrah!" he shouted. "Sally, look! they've come, papa and mamma, and—O thunder!—Cobbs is there, too!"

Certainly Cobbs was there, placidly holding the horses; but it was not to Cobbs or to the Seytons that Cecil bounded. He caught a tall gentleman's hand with both his own. "O dad! O dad!" was all that he could say.

But in a moment he saw Cobbs, and shook hands with an effusion that made Mr. Raimund stare.

"O Cobbs, we've got the proof! We can clear you!" he cried.

"Laws! I'm all right," said Cobbs; "the cunnel and Kitchen done cl'ared me, and sent that Mitchell 'baout his business."

Presently they were all back in the library, where they found Larry in a vigorous discussion with Aunt Valley, who was for incontinently running away.

At the colonel's entrance she sank helplessly back to subside into morose silence.

"Come," said the colonel, "let us get this thing straightened. I hear about a hundred questions. First, I ought to hear—but I don't—'How is Aunt Ernestine?'"

"Oh, yes, papa," said Sally, penitently, "how is she?"

"She is much better. Yes, we got your telegram. So we came home a day sooner. And your father joined us for a surprise.—That's to your questions, Cecil."

"And Cobbs, papa?" said Ally, eagerly.

"Yes, Cobbs, uncle?" said Cecil, eagerly.

"Well, I never did see the beat of them boys," said Cobbs himself, radiant in the doorway.

"Why, Cobbs," said the colonel, "we found Cobbs and the sheriff at the station. But, as Kitchen had helped Cobbs hunt that mule all the night of the Ku-klux, and as I looked out myself and saw them in the moonlight bringing the mule back, why we made out a very clear case of *alibi*."

"And Mr. Mitchell, papa?" said Sally, who couldn't get over a sneaking liking for the pleasant man who helped her find the boys, and called her Miss Seyton—"did he feel very bad?"

"Well, he was a bit taken aback; but, as he stands in to get a big reward for the counterfeiters' capture (he's been after them for a year, and suspected that they were operating in this country), he doesn't mind much."

It was now time to tell of Aunt Valley's performances.

The children were rather scandalized when their great tragedy was received with an outbreak of merriment from the elders. Even Mrs. Seyton laughed, though she said Aunt Valley deserved to be punished.

"But we can't let her get into your abominable convict-camp," said Mr. Raimund.

"Lawd bress ye, boss!" cried Aunt Valley.

"Compounding a felony, you know," said the colonel.

"We can't be *certain* she did it." said Mrs. Seyton.

"And Cobbs is all right and safe, anyhow," said Ally.

"And the darkeys won't be scared any more, because they 'low it is Dawsey, and he's dead," said Sally.

"And nobody will know that we let her off," said Cecil.

"And what the mind don't know the heart cayn't grieve," said Cobbs.

Well, I really don't think that Aunt Valley deserved Cobbs's intercession, after all that was come and gone; still, it was effectual. The upshot was that

the colonel gave Aunt Valley a stern lecture on her evil courses, including the conjure business—a lecture to which she listened with a beautiful humility —warned her to keep her own counsel about the whole affair, which there was no reason to doubt she would do; and eventually dismissed her. Whereupon she went home in a jubilant state of peace quite unbecoming the committer of an outrage that had inspired at least a dozen scorching leaders in Northern journals.

Larry was to remain. He offered no suggestion about himself; but, when Ally turned to him and said, "You're to stay here with us for a while, Larry," everybody saw for the first time that Larry could smile.

"I are obleeged to ye, Ally," said he. He did not appear to consider that there was any other person to thank. From first to last he had seen, and he saw, only Ally in his little world.

Having thus "made his manners," as Aunt Valley had taught him, he sat down on the floor, his back to the lounge where Ally sat, very much as a dog might lie at his master's feet, and remained in this posture, quite passive and content.

You may imagine how much there was to talk about: how eagerly the fathers listened to the de-

tails of the hunt; how pale Mrs. Seyton grew when Cecil, who was telling the story, came to their peeping through the crack on the counterfeiters, and how many times she kissed Sally (snuggled up to her mother on the lounge) when Sally's part of the adventure came to light; and how the men laughed and choked by turns over it all.

Perhaps their feelings were best expressed by the colonel, who burst out, "My goodness, boys, how naughty you've been, and how proud I am of you!"

"But I want to understand," said Mrs. Seyton, "how Sally ever came to suspect Aunt Valley?"

"Yes," said Ally, "wasn't sis cute? Cis and me never mistrusted a thing."

"Not a thing," agreed Cis.

"Yes, Sally, how was it?" said Mr. Raimund. He did very well in the big arm-chair, with Cis perched on one arm; and he had his own arm exactly in the right place to give his boy an occasional hug.

"Tell dad as you told me, Sally," Cecil added.

"Why it was this way, Cousin John," said Sally, blushing. "You see, first, Aunt Valley said Melodeon waked her up that night when she saw Dawsey. And then, you remember, papa, when she came to the store and was telling about it, why, she

said it was Abram Lincoln. So I wondered. Then, you know we found the lame mule's tracks, and Abram Lincoln was lame. And Cobbs thought it was Mist' Henderson, because there was a place where he was eating hackberries; but all Aunt Valley's mules eat hackberries, so I wondered some more. It seemed so impossible I wouldn't speak of it; but when we got home Cobbs showed me the pipe, and it was like the one I gave Aunt Valley. Besides, I didn't think she was nearly so lame as she pretended—and you know, mamma, she is schemy as Brer Rabbit. So, somehow, altogether I—wondered, you know."

"I think," said Mr. Raimund, "that Sally ought to have a reward for discovering the Ku-klux, and Ally for the counterfeiters."

"No, sir," said Ally; "I never would have gone there but for Cis. I was scared."

"Scared!" cried Cecil; "I wish you'd seen him, dad."

The two fathers looked on with pleased eyes.

"You and I over again, John," the colonel whispered.

Mrs. Seyton laid a gentle hand on the boy's shoulder. "Perhaps, then, Cecil, you will be content to stay with us this month longer."

"I shall be glad to, Aunt Emily," said Cecil.

"My dear boy!" said she; and kissed him.

At this moment Vance, answering an order of half an hour previous, appeared grinning, with a bottle of wine.

On a sign from the colonel he launched the tray precariously at him. Then Vance filled the glasses —and a large portion of the tray—and the colonel lifted his own glass.

"This is just in time for a toast," said he. "Cobbs, here's your glass, man. 'We all, East and West, North and South! To our better acquaintance, because that means to our better and closer and dearer friendship.'"

He put his glass down, to stretch out the one hand that the war had left him to Raimund, and then drank the toast.

"I think so, too, Ally," said Cecil.

CHAPTER XVI.

CONCLUSION.

Cobbs was a modest man, and his reception at church the next day astonished him.

The school-house where the services were held was filled quite as much on account of Cobbs as the Methodist circuit-rider who preached. But it was a red-letter day for him also, good, struggling man, for he found in the collection (taken up for his stipend) not only the expected five-dollar note from Colonel Seyton, but a mysterious one of twenty dollars that he could only attribute to the strange gentleman; and many a grateful thought followed John Raimund's unknown travels, many a prayer, too, I dare say, from a little four-roomed house in an Arkansas clearing.

Cobbs sat well to the front. He was always a tidy man, but I will not say that to-day he had not given his neat Sunday suit of brown-check an ex-

tra flip of the brush or his shaven cheeks a little more of the razor.

The preacher improved his opportunities, and alluded to the "end of the transgressor" (which was to be expected), but that Cobbs should figure as "the righteous" was an embarrassing surprise. Redder and redder he grew, while every eye in the church (except the babies') was fixed upon him, and divers devout sisters kept up a pious fusillade of ejaculations, such as — "Bless God!" "Amen, brother!" "That's so!" "He's a good man!" "Oh, save!" and the like, until Cobbs would have welcomed an earthquake.

The widow on Willow, who was present with six of the poor man's blessings, all under ten, and who had a noble, strong voice, was a successful rival to Mrs. Kitchen in shouting or groaning approval; and so uplifted was Brother Warren (the preacher) by his hearers' sympathy that his eloquence waxed warm and warmer, and his blows on the teacher's desk (which served for a pulpit) stout and stouter, with the result of quite electrifying a usually stolid congregation, besides tipping over the ink-bottle inside the desk—indeed, I incline myself to date from this sermon Brother Warren's rapidly increasing reputation as an orator. He

told his wife that he was fairly surprised at himself.

Certainly he surprised Cobbs. Mr. Raimund was just behind Cobbs. He had subscribed some money to the building of this very school-house, which was on the border of the Seytons' plantation, and therefore he looked about him with some curiosity.

It was a substantial building of wood and neatly painted, neatly furnished also with desks, blackboards, and maps, in the usual school fashion.

The only especial decoration for religious services was a pile of Moody-and-Sankey hymn-books and a Bible on the desk, and two inscriptions in fat, bright, black letters on the white front wall, one of which read, "THE LORD WILL PROVIDE," and the other "PLEASE DO NOT SPIT ON THE FLOOR."

Between these inscriptions and the sermon John Raimund was at some effort to keep a proper composure.

"You did well, Cis," he said, afterward; "I didn't see the ghost of a smile about you."

"Well, dad," said Cis, slowly, "I was amused at the signs; but I've seen them before, and then to-day, somehow, I felt solemn."

His father pressed his arm, but said nothing; he understood.

Already that morning they had had a long talk, and Cecil was likely to remember while he lived some things that his father had told him about the rare and faithful friendship of the Seytons, and some things that he had said of the duties of every man to other men—not as his friends nor his equals nor his possible helpers, but simply as men born into the same world with him to live, and suffer, and die.

Cis had learned much in the last two weeks. Learning is always a sobering business, and to learn so quickly as Cis had done is likely to give the brains a dizzy feeling. Cis was very quiet all that Sunday.

When his father spoke to him, they were standing a little apart, waiting for the Seytons (who had to greet the whole neighborhood), therefore they had a full view of Cobbs's ovation. Everybody spoke to him; everybody shook hands with him. As a rule, the Arkansas "renters" and farmers are an unexpressive, irresponsive people, but they were stirred out of their apathy now. Dawsey's death had removed the secret dread and open irritations of years.

Half a dozen men in the congregation were debtors of Dawsey, who felt a weight lifted off their shoulders. Kitchen and Rose and the others of the party who captured the counterfeiters stood beside Cobbs and were equal heroes of the occasion.

"What I felt sorriest for Cobbs fur in the whole blamed business," said Kitchen, who himself had shot Dawsey, "is that he cudn't see that ar purty little fight. That did ben *rilin'!*"

"Yes, sir," said Rose, sympathetically, "but the cunnel given him the gyardin' of his children, an' I say he done jes' right."

"Well," said Cobbs, "I did squirm consid'able inside; but I cudn't think er no other way."

"Ef that ar Dawsey had got off an' seen em," said one man "'twould a ben plumb like his meanness to a' shot a shoot at 'em, specially Ally. I heerd him goin' on, at the gypsies' camp, baout how he'd fix Ally 'cause he tripped him up. Yes, *sir*, Cobbs done right."

There was one man in the congregration who would have hurried past. It was the doctor. Him, however, Cobbs hailed in a friendly way, as one bearing no malice.

"Say, doctor, if ye got time, run 'round to my

house this evenin'; like ye to look at Larry's ankle. He's a-stoppin' with me, now."

The doctor hesitated, but he was man enough to say:

"I expect you know I've been thinking rather hard things of you Mr. Cobbs?"

"And sayin' of 'em tew," growled Rose.

"Laws! that don't caount," said Cobbs, cheerfully; "no harm intended an' no great done, like the man said when he shot the darkey stealin' his chickens, 'lowin' it ben a mad dog. Ef you had a knowed me fur years and then blamed sich a trick on me, 'twud a' ben another thing. But as 'tis, I ain't holdin' no hard feelin', an' hope you ain't."

"No, sir—no, indeed, sir," said the doctor. So he, too, shook hands.

But now the Seytons were ready and the Seyton party drove homeward.

"Did I tell you what Cis wants me to do for Cobbs?" Mr. Raimund, who sat in the front leaned backward to say to Mrs. Seyton—Cis and Ally were mounted escort, riding ahead—"he's keen to have me send for Cobbs's brother-in-law so he can get his mother back. He says he wants to do something nice for Cobbs."

"I think he has done something nice for Cobbs," said Mrs. Seyton, "according to Kitchen and Rose. He made a great speech at the store for Cobbs, they say; and Cobbs is brimming over with gratitude."

"Cobbs is a faithful soul," Mr. Raimund said, musingly. "I think I shall have to let Cis have his way. I remember old Mrs. Cobbs used to be good to me."

"That will make one thing easy, Larry's going to Cobbs's."

"You still think that will be best?"

"Yes, John, he will have a good home, and Cobbs will make a man of him. Cobbs can't talk good grammar, but he can keep the commandments better than most."

"He can, for a fact," chimed in the colonel. "He is brave, faithful, and honest. Ally isn't far out in his admiration for Cobbs. But, speaking of Cobbs, reminds me I have just had a note from Mitchell. He acknowledges the receipt of the money I paid him for his services, and warns me that there is some mystery about the Ku-klux business. He doesn't believe, now, that Dawsey had anything to do with it. And he sends his regards to Sally."

"Does he offer to come up and clear it up for you?" said Mr. Raimund.

"Oh, no, sir, he is too important a man for that; he only came up in the first place because he was on Dawsey's track in the counterfeiting business."

"Well, *I* shall pay Miss Sally five hundred dollars, since you won't sacrifice Larry or Aunt Valley to the manes of justice and get that much from the State."

This, indeed, was what was done. The secret was kept. But Aunt Valley has been more active since that time in her legitimate sphere of root and herb doctor, and very much less active in conjuring.

Another token of reform may be that she is talking of sending for Uncle Hobson.

Cecil spent all winter with his cousins, and he has persuaded his mother to invite the Seytons to Chicago.

"And remember," says Cecil, often in his letters to Ally, "wherever we are, we are always going to be friends and brothers, and when we grow up we are going to be partners."

Meanwhile, it is like Cis, who is fond of trinkets and flummery, to wear a fob-seal, on which is en-

graved a wild boar's head and the letters "W. A." The head is a reminiscence of another hog-fight, where Cis *did* kill the boar, and the letters stand for WE ALL.

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